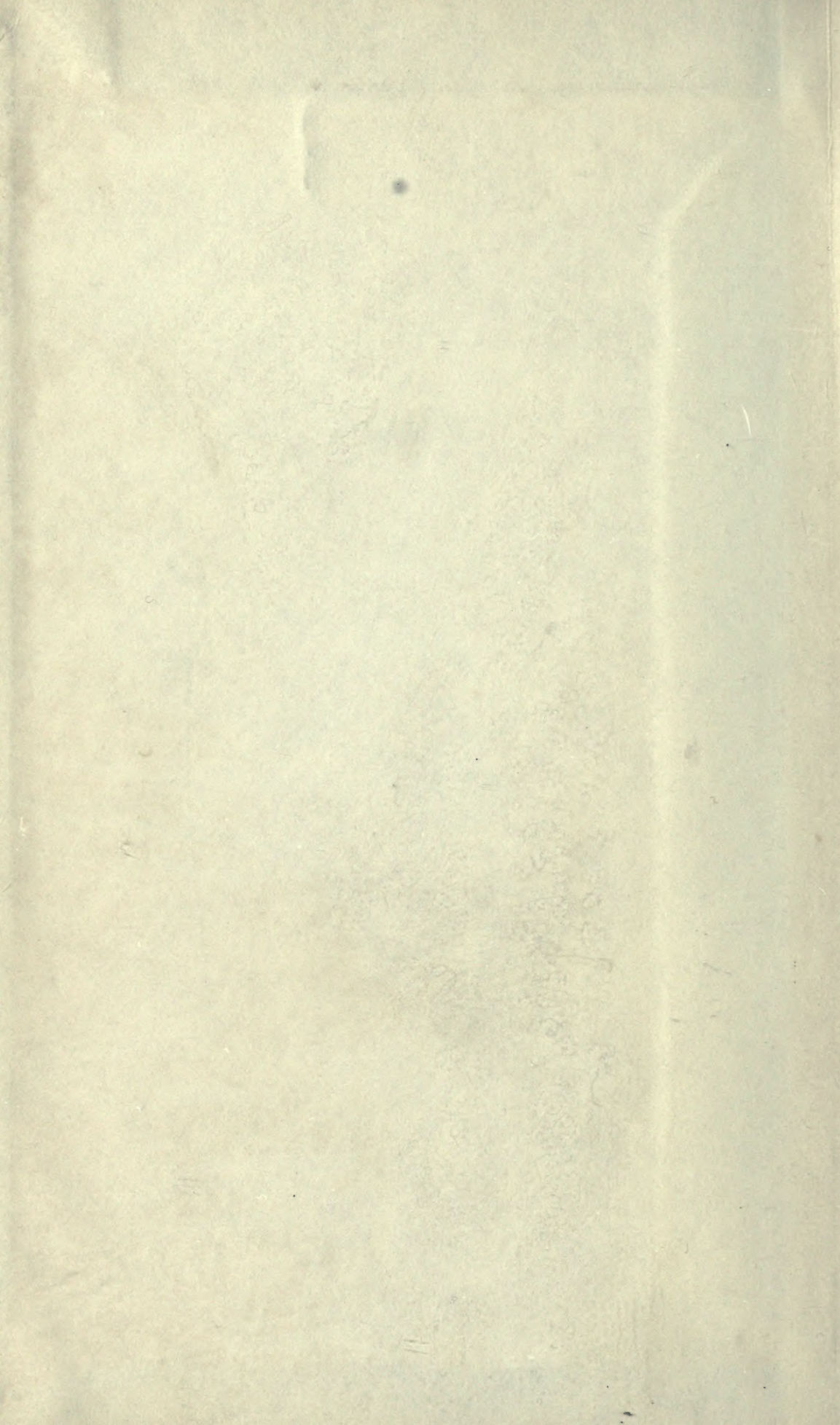
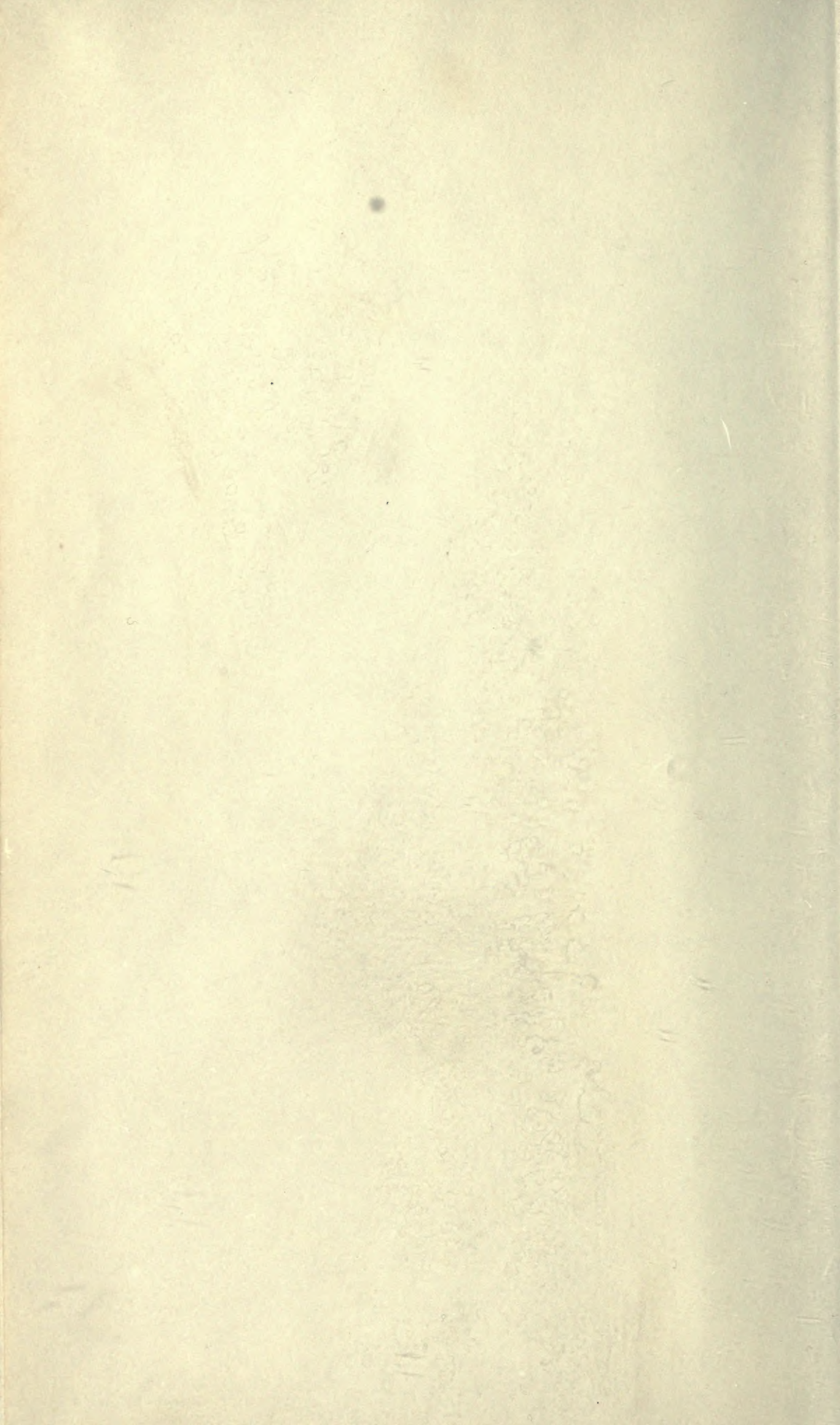





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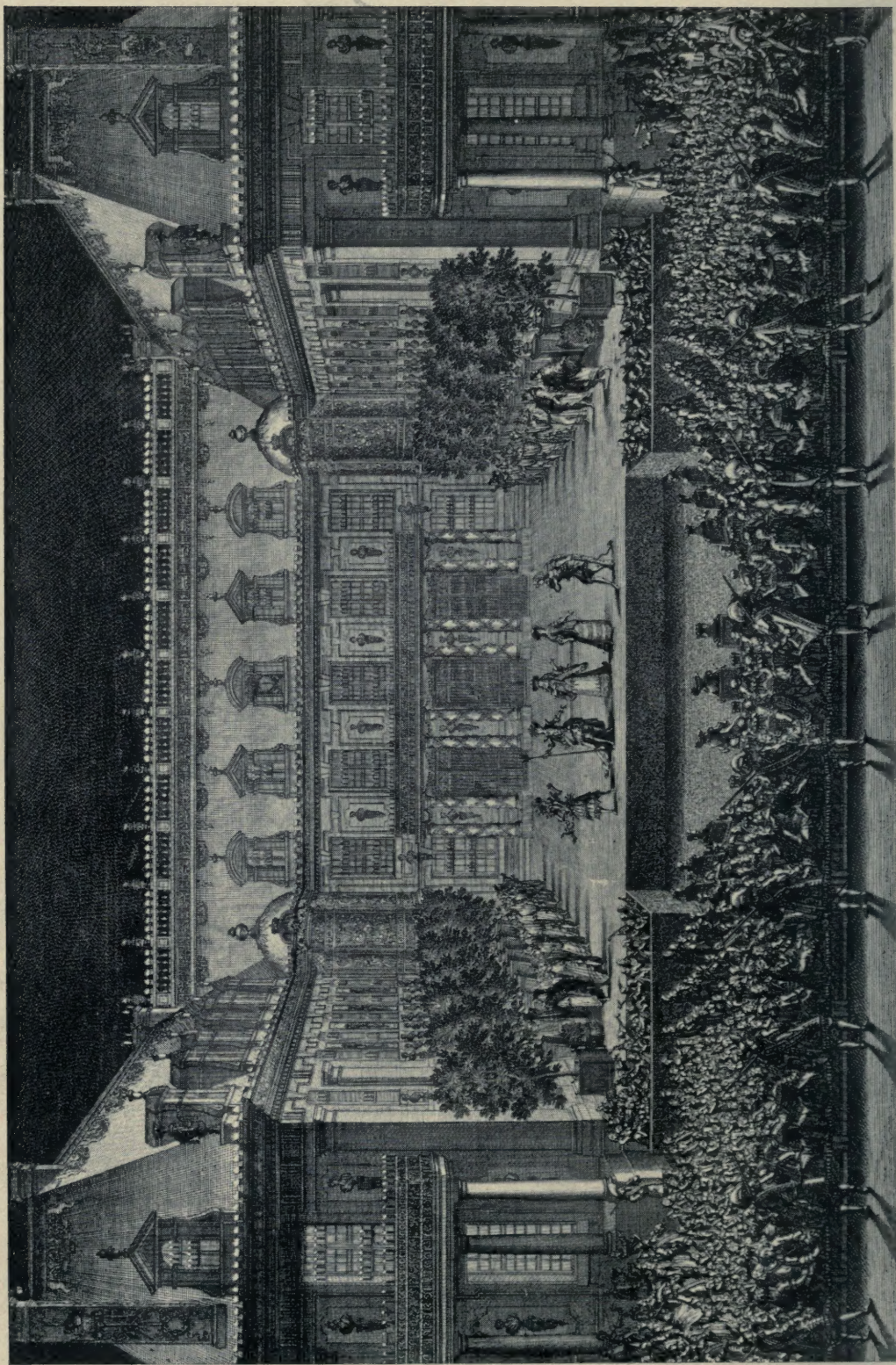


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A REPRESENTATION OF 'ALCESTE' AT VERSAILLES

AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
FRENCH CLASSICAL
DRAMA

BY

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	5
CHAPTER I	
THE DRAMA OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY IN FRANCE.	
GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS	11
CHAPTER II	
CORNEILLE AND THE FRENCH STAGE	35
CHAPTER III	
CORNEILLE AND THE SPANISH DRAMA	60
CHAPTER IV	
CORNEILLE AND THE THEORY OF THE DRAMA	76
CHAPTER V	
MOLIÈRE AND THE FRENCH AND ITALIAN STAGE	98
CHAPTER VI	
MOLIÈRE, FROM <i>L'ÉCOLE DES MARIS</i> TO <i>LE MISANTHROPE</i>	117
CHAPTER VII	
THE COMEDY OF MOLIÈRE	138
CHAPTER VIII	
RACINE AND THE GREEK DRAMA	148
CHAPTER IX	
THE DRAMATIC BACKGROUND IN THE PLAYS OF RACINE.	170
CHAPTER X	
RACINE AS A POETICAL DRAMATIST	183

	PAGE
NOTE I	
CORNEILLE'S TREATMENT OF THE ARISTOTELIAN TEXT .	193
NOTE II	
ADAPTATIONS OF FRENCH CLASSICAL PLAYS IN GERMANY .	195
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE	198
INDEX	201

PREFACE

IF we assume with the large majority of French critics that the seventeenth century was the time in which French art most truly reflected the ideal qualities of the French nation as a whole, we shall be anxious to discover in the literature of that century what it is that marks it off from the pseudo-classical literature of the age of Anne in England, and why the *Siècle d'or* is a truer epithet as applied to France than the 'Augustan age' as applied to England.

It was, in the first place, the age of the greatest French dramatists: and it is not generally disputed that though the genius of the French can be expressed in beautiful and lucid prose, whether in the seventeenth-century 'period' or the freer, more pictured phrase of modern times, yet the drama offers to the French spirit its greatest opportunities. Perhaps one reason for this is to be seen in a consideration of the national temperament. In contrast to the genius of the Teuton, which tends to express the thought and emotion of the individual, the French mind tends to express in art and literature the thought and feeling of man as part of a society. We are reminded by every writer on French literature that literature is a reflection of society, real or ideal, but it is equally true that the characters in French literature of the higher and more serious order all have a social part to play,¹ and the critic, in judging a French

¹ See Brunetière, *Manuel de l'histoire de la littérature française*, pp. 100-105: 'On ne croit plus que l'objet de chacun soit le libre développement des puissances que la nature peut avoir mises en lui . . . il ne suffit pas non plus d'abandonner le corps social à lui-même pour qu'il trouve son point d'équilibre, et il faut que chacun de nous travaille de sa personne à le rétablir constamment. C'est ce que veut dire le bon Du Vair . . .

work of art, considers whether the characters fulfil their social obligations. Thus he has a generalized idea of what is becoming to wife, sister, child, or mother, and the French heroine does not put forward the first claim of the individual life. The hero is judged in his civic duty and profession as well as in his family relations. So, in the seventeenth century, the critics who condemned Corneille's *Polyeucte* did so partly on the ground that idol-breaking was an unpatriotic act.

This view appears to be inherent in the classical drama from Corneille to Voltaire, and is equally evident in minor writers such as Diderot, who prepared the way for the modern play. It is not conspicuous in the romantic drama of the nineteenth century in France, and that dramatic experiment has had no succession. It reappears in the drama of the present day, notably in Émile Augier and Dumas *fils*, and in the modern problem play, and the conception has now become general in Europe.

It was also characteristic of the seventeenth century in France that a restrained and conscious choice was exercised by the artist. The dramatist narrowed his stage, and simplified—for the time—his scenery, reduced the number of characters in a play and subjected it to the three unities, the theory of which, accepted from a general, if incorrect, interpretation of Aristotle, was in accordance with his own sense of fitness (at any rate in tragedy). Such an art tended to be clear rather than vague, and to be inspired by a sense

Organisons la vie sociale . . . Nous tenons là l'idée dernière du classicisme, et l'histoire de la littérature française pendant cent cinquante ou deux cents ans ne va plus être que l'histoire des transformations ou des progrès de cette idée maîtresse. Ainsi . . . nous voyons une littérature originale et nationale tendre à se dégager de l'imitation des littératures étrangères . . . cette littérature sera surtout sociale . . . Étant sociale elle sera générale dans ses moyens d'expression, cette littérature sera encore morale, dans la mesure précise où il ne saurait exister de société sans morale.'

of order as well as by a sense of beauty, but, as we hope to show, it was none the less a true reflection of life for being a conscious one, and an artistic one for being restrained.

It is perhaps difficult for a generation still under the influence of the Romantic movement not to judge somewhat hardly the literature of the French classical period, and the tendency, in England at any rate, still is to lay stress on its artificial character.¹ The classical ideal is described as cold, and the speeches of the characters rhetorical, while the form is condemned as wanting in elasticity and naturalness. Yet it is this type of drama which has its roots so deep in the problems of human conduct that it still controls the stage, while no writer attempts to fill the larger canvas of a Shakespeare, and to show, in successive episodes, an impression of life in many aspects—in other words, to recover the element of epic in the drama. Possibly we may find on examination that the French classical drama of the seventeenth century has been influential because it is not cold, but thrilling with passion, because the words are not mere rhetoric, but carry the right meaning, because the setting is not a sign of artificiality, but of art. The real antithesis may be not, as has been supposed, between the naturalism of the present day and the conventionalism of the seventeenth century, but between the subjectivity of the Teutonic idea, with its accompanying love of mystery and expansiveness, and the French social ideal, whether expressed by Corneille and Racine in different forms of romanticism, or by Molière in those of realism.

¹ This has been the complaint of England against France in the matter of the drama whenever England has had dramatic critics, from Dryden onwards. See, for example, J. C. Bailey, *The Claims of French Poetry*, especially the chapter on 'English Taste and the French Drama'. A recent most careful consideration of the issues thus raised is to be found in E. Legouis, *Défense de la Poésie française*, 1912.

In the study of the national art of France we see that the French dramatists of the seventeenth century accepted, and indeed imposed on themselves, great limitations of subject and treatment, but in so doing they were able to express their own personality and to reflect the life of their age. So far as they could do this, their 'classic' art has its justification. For a theory of aesthetic should not describe art as merely reflecting life, or social life, at any one stage : art in general is better defined as reflecting life in progress and development. Now in the evolution of society the consciousness of the individual and of the group is the chief determining factor. We have therefore a reason for admitting the forms of art which, as in the French literature of the seventeenth century, reflect the conscious life instead of the immature conditions of society.¹ The conscious element which is a condition of all art that reflects life in progress, is especially characteristic of the genius of the French ; this is one of many facts to be observed which may help us to a modification of a theory of aesthetic as applied to dramatic literature.

This introductory essay does not attempt to do more than suggest lines of investigation and reading, and therefore the

¹ If we accept the formula that art reflects life in progress, we shall be able to see why the representation of certain facts in society have proved unpopular and even impossible on the stage ; for an audience will not submit to a representation in art of conditions out of which society has grown. Thus the subject of the betrayal of friendship or the primitive laws of hospitality ceased early to be an acceptable subject for drama, while villainy of other kinds, not yet entirely repudiated by the moral sense of society, is still represented on the stage. See on this subject, Corneille, *Discours du Poème dramatique*, pp. 20, 21 : 'Notre théâtre souffre difficilement de pareils sujets, le *Thyeste* de Sénèque n'y a pas été fort heureux : sa *Médée* y a trouvé plus de faveur, mais aussi, à le bien prendre, la perfidie de Jason et la violence du roi de Corinthe la font paraître si injustement opprimée que l'auditeur entre aisément dans ses intérêts et regarde sa vengeance comme une justice qu'elle se fait elle-même de ceux qui l'oppriment.' See also *Discours de la Tragédie*, p. 65.

illustrations given are not exhaustive. It is hoped, however, that it may serve as a basis for a more detailed study of the subject. My obligations to both French and English critics are great, and are acknowledged in the footnotes to the chapters.

My grateful thanks are due to the Rev. A. J. Carlyle, D.Litt., to H. E. Berthon, M.A., and to Mrs. Rathbone, for their kind help and criticism in preparing these papers for publication.

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NOTE

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The page-references to Corneille, Molière and Racine are to the editions in *Les grands écrivains de la France* (Hachette et C^{ie}).



CHAPTER I

THE DRAMA OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY IN FRANCE

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

IN our study of a special literature, such as that of the seventeenth century in France, we should attempt to look below certain mechanical classifications in speech, which are somewhat misleading, and examine the real meanings of the words 'comedy', 'tragedy', as they appeared to seventeenth-century minds. The terms 'comedy' and 'tragedy' did not mean to France what they had meant on the Athenian stage, nor even what they had meant in Elizabethan England. In France, as in Spain,¹ the term *comédie* had a very general meaning, and stood for many types of drama represented on a stage, though by the seventeenth century the *genres* began to be further differentiated. We find Molière distinguishing *Mélicerte* as a *comédie-pastorale - héroïque*, and *Don Garcie de Navarre* as a *comédie-héroïque*; while his other plays are still called *comédies*, and Corneille and Racine have marked out their tragedies by giving them the definite name. But the name *comédie* as applied to Corneille's *La Veuve*, Racine's *Les Plaideurs*, and Molière's *Tartufe* and *Misanthrope* covered a good many *genres*. Thus Corneille, in his *Discours du poème dramatique*, tells us that Aristotle's definition of comedy does not satisfy him.² He appeals from low comedy to a new ideal of heroic comedy where the characters and

¹ In Spain the term *comedia* was used in contradistinction to the *autos sacramentales*, i.e. mystery plays not meant for representation on a stage.

² *Poetics*, v. 1.

12 DRAMA OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

situation may be dignified and removed from those of farce and caricature.

‘On n’avait jamais vu jusque-là que la comédie fît rire sans personnages ridicules, tels que les valets bouffons, les parasites, les capitans, les docteurs,’ &c.¹

Again, he appeals from the Greek idea of the reconciliation of enemies, which, according to Aristotle, should conclude a comedy,² to that of a readjustment of relations, which he claims should characterize the end of a comedy drawn from modern life.

‘Pour la comédie, Aristote ne lui impose point d’autre devoir pour conclusion *que de rendre amis ceux qui étoient ennemis* ; ce qu’il faut entendre un peu plus généralement que les termes ne semblent porter et l’étendre à la réconciliation de toute sorte de mauvaise intelligence . . .’³

The term ‘tragedy’ had been applied in the sixteenth century to a different type of tragic drama from that which marked the seventeenth century. In sixteenth-century tragedy the position of the crisis was not at the end, and a history of the results of the conflict occupied the latter part of the play. In the seventeenth century the play ended with the crisis, but both types of drama were known as tragedies, while a play containing a great deal of narrative and action, and presenting many aspects of a story, not strictly bound together in relation to a central conflict, was known in the early days of the seventeenth century as a tragi-comedy.⁴

The broad distinction between tragedy and comedy was perhaps this. In the thought of the seventeenth century

¹ *Examen de Mélie*, p. 138.

² *Poetics*, xiii. 8.

³ *Discours du poème dramatique*, p. 27.

⁴ See the plays of Alexandre Hardy, 1560-1630 (about), which were intended to appeal to the people, and not written for a learned or literary audience as were Corneille’s. See also the work of Jean de Schelandre and Rotrou.

tragedy dealt with ideal conditions, which might be foreign or ancient, and much symbolism was used in its expression on the stage. Comedy, on the other hand, was intended to be a picture of real life; ¹ and it is interesting to see the transition of thought from one to the other. For instance, the ideas of personal and political liberty, of honour and duty, are seen in their ideal aspects in the tragedies of Corneille. In the comedies we see the same ideas struggling for expression in faulty natures and in everyday surroundings. We may illustrate this point by referring to Corneille's treatment of the characters of women in his plays. It has been noticed that his tragic heroines are moved not only by the passion of love, but by other passions, political and personal, as for instance those of ambition and revenge. The women on the Cornelian stage are shown working together with men and sometimes in conflict with them, but never moved only by personal emotional considerations. So the woman, like the man, in the tragedy of Corneille may incarnate the notion of free will, of honour, of duty.] Émilie in *Cinna*, for example (as Balzac saw), stood for the idea of liberty.

C'est une lâcheté que de remettre à d'autres
Les intérêts publics qui s'attachent aux nôtres.

¹ In the earlier work of Corneille we can see how he gave a realistic setting to his comedies by bringing his characters to Paris, and letting them meet in La Place Royale or in the Galerie du Palais. In *La Veuve* he carried out a deliberate intention of making the action true to life and the time represented. 'La comédie n'est qu'un portrait de nos actions et de nos discours, et la perfection des portraits consiste en la ressemblance. Sur cette maxime je tâche de ne mettre en la bouche de mes acteurs que ce que diroient vraisemblablement en leur place ceux qu'ils représentent, et de les faire discourir en honnêtes gens, et non pas en auteurs . . . Le plus beau de leurs entretiens est en équivoques et en propositions dont ils se laissent les conséquences à tirer' ('Au lecteur,' p. 377). See also Seigall, *Corneille and the Spanish Drama*. In *Le Menteur*, Cliton and Dorante talk about the Paris which is the scene of the play.

Joignons à la douceur de venger nos parents
 La gloire qu'on remporte à punir les tyrans,
 Et faisons publier par toute l'Italie :
 La liberté de Rome est l'œuvre d'Émilie ;
 On a touché son âme, et son cœur s'est épris ;
 Mais elle n'a donné son amour qu'à ce prix.¹

If we compare the heroines of his comedy with the splendid figures of his tragic drama,² we shall find the women of Corneille more varied than his ideal types, and of all shades of femininity. To take one example from an early comedy—in *La Veuve*, Clarice is the typical charming woman who has dignity and brightness of wit, but who is compact of sentiment and self-analysis.

Que mon rang me déplaît ! que mon trop de fortune
 Au lieu de m'obliger, me choque et m'importune !
 Égale à mon Philiste, il m'offriroit ses vœux . . .³

Chrysante, the mother of Doris, is, as her daughter bitterly says, *une mère aveuglée*,⁴ and, as her son admits, a money-seeking matchmaker.⁵ A new element appears in Doris, who, though feeling all the traditional respect for

¹ *Cinna*, act i, sc. 2.

² Corneille defends his 'heroic' heroines from contemporary criticism in the address, 'Au lecteur', printed at the beginning of *Sophonisbe*.

'Vous trouverez en cette tragédie les caractères tels que chez Tite Live, vous verrez Sophonisbe avec le même attachement aux intérêts de son pays, et la même haine pour Rome qu'il lui attribue . . . J'aime mieux qu'on me reproche d'avoir fait mes femmes trop héroïnes, par une ignorante et basse affectation de les faire ressembler aux originaux qui en sont venus jusqu'à nous, que de m'entendre louer d'avoir efféminé mes héros par une docte et sublime complaisance au goût de nos délicats, qui veulent de l'amour partout, et ne permettent qu'à lui de faire auprès d'eux la bonne ou mauvaise fortune de mes ouvrages' (*Sophonisbe*, Au lecteur, pp. 464, 469).

³ Act i, sc. 6.

⁴ Act iv, sc. 9.

⁵

Les femmes de son âge ont ce mal ordinaire
 De régler sur les biens une pareille affaire :
 Un si honteux motif leur a fait tout décider
 Et l'or qui les aveugle a droit de les guider . . .

Act iii, sc. 3.

the authority of her mother and family, and assenting to the marriage arrangements made for her, parries Alcidon's cold, selfish thrusts with the rapier of her wit, sees through his character :—

son âme a deux visages,
Et ce dissimulé n'est qu'un conteur à gages . . .
Il ne me prête rien que je ne lui renvoie¹

—till even Chrysante admires her skill.²

When confronted with Alcidon's falsity she is able to refuse all compromise, and dismisses him with scorn.

Va, je ne veux point d'heur qui parte de ta main.³

But in the monologue that follows she puts into words that could not be more terse and telling, the position of the woman who has no liberty and whose happiness is the stake of others' caprice.

Qu'aux filles comme moi le sort est inhumain !
Que leur condition se trouve déplorable !
Une mère aveuglée, un frère inexorable,
Chacun de son côté, prennent sur mon devoir
Et sur mes volontés un absolu pouvoir.
Chacun me veut forcer à suivre son caprice :
L'un a ses amitiés, l'autre a son avarice.⁴

At the moment, however, when she says

Cependant il y va du reste de ma vie,

and we expect some thrill of revolt, she continues :

Et je n'ose écouter tant soit peu mon envie ;
Il faut que mes désirs, toujours indifférents,
Aillent sans résistance au gré de mes parents,
Qui m'apprêtent peut-être un brutal, un sauvage :
Et puis cela s'appelle une fille bien sage.⁵

¹ Act i, sc. 3.

² Je meure, mon enfant, si tu n'es admirable.
Et ta dextérité me semble incomparable : . . .
Tu vaux trop. C'est ainsi qu'il faut, quand on se moque,
Que le moqué toujours sorte fort satisfait : . . .

Act iii, sc. 4.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Act iv, sc. 9.

⁵ Ibid.

✓ Conventions close her in rigorously, and her only refuge is the appeal to prayer.

The struggle of the human will in circumstances that are debasing and overmastering is here quite clearly expressed.¹ Compare with it the conditions of voluntary self-abnegation, as in *Sophonisbe* :

De tout votre destin vous êtes la maîtresse ;
Je la serai du mien . . . ;²

or, as in *Cinna*, with the expression of confidence in the power of the human will, where Auguste says :

Je suis maître de moi comme de l'univers,
Je le suis, je veux l'être.³

The picture of manners Corneille called up in high comedy should be read in connexion with the ideal picture in the tragedies.

The comedy of Molière gives us a type of drama distinct from the high or heroic comedy, and one which was new to his own time, though related in his early plays to the farce. He looked upon life as a rational observer, and chose a frame for his drama which was unlike that of Corneille, though he agreed with him in considering the end of the drama to be the pleasure of the audience.

A mind like his tended to classify impressions. And ✓ the habit of classification leads to a comic treatment of the drama. For laughter, as Bergson has taught us in *Le Rire*, arises when, expecting something vivid and alive, we are brought up sharply against a classification. So the incongruous relation of an individual to a class to which he does not consciously belong excites our amusement.⁴

¹ See also Clarice's words in *Le Menteur*, act ii, sc. 2.

² Act v, sc. 4.

³ *Cinna*, act v, sc. 3.

⁴ ' Il y a toujours au fond du comique, disions-nous, la tendance à se laisser glisser le long d'une pente facile qui est le plus souvent la pente de l'habitude ' (Bergson, *Le Rire*, pp. 199, 200). ' . . . Un personnage comique

Thus the drama of Molière took its characteristic shape through the relation of seventeenth-century life to a classification imposed upon it. Molière pressed upon French life as he knew it the form of the Italian masque.¹ With this in his early comedies he marked out his types: and they are quite easily derived from the Italian precedent. His first gallery of characters is practically limited by this. The limitation of action follows as a natural consequence. As Molière developed, the characters in his later plays, though still keeping the type and sometimes even the name of the earlier ones, claim much more interest as individuals.²

The peculiar quality of French comedy which reaches its highest development in Molière is the contrast between the ideal and the true which is suggested within the play in the French comedy of manners. Thus the classification of well-known types (which leads to farce) is found side by side with the study of characters full of greater life and purpose. The comedy of Molière is then not irresponsible or light-hearted play. It is as moral in its consequences as the purposeful tragedies of Corneille. Types and conditions are presented to us, and consequences follow (as in *Tartufe* and *L'Avare*), which preach a sermon to the audience.³

est généralement comique dans l'exacte mesure où il s'ignore lui-même. Le comique est inconscient' (p. 17).

¹ The 'masque' was a personage of fixed and invariable characterization. The actor presenting this character improvised suitable speeches and played up to a plot in which the acts of the 'masque' were settled beforehand.

² See Lanson, 'Molière et la Farce' (*Revue de Paris*), 1^{er} mai 1901.

³ 'Et ce n'est pas seulement par la leçon finale qui résulte des faits, mais encore par de véritables sermons placés tout exprès dans la bouche des Cléantes et des Aristes que les comédies de Molière sont la glorification du bon sens.' Stapfer, *Molière et Shakespeare*, p. 163. So too, Meredith says, 'The *Femmes Savantes* is a capital instance of the uses of comedy in teaching the world to understand what ails it.' *The Idea of Comedy*, pp. 33, 34. 'Never did man wield so shrieking a scourge upon vice, but his consummate self-mastery is not shaken while administering it. *Tartufe*

In the case of Racine we see worked out the deep tragedy of consequence. As his characters display less strength and purpose than those of Corneille, so they are less able to conquer the world in which they live, and in proportion to this loss of strength they become the prey of a world in which determinism reigns, in which scientific cause and effect can be traced. If the end of Phèdre is inherent in her passions and character, it is not (as in the case of the heroines of Corneille) because she deliberately chooses her course, but because she recklessly enters upon it. As she loses hold of inner strength the relentless movement of necessity catches her in its wheel. Here Racine very naturally chooses for the setting of his drama not that of Aeschylus, whose view of a moral law, modified by the Christian idea, was characteristic of Corneille, but the setting that belonged to the Greeks at a stage of their literature when the sense of the compulsion of nature was strong upon them. While his characters share in the *sensibilité* of the French mind, they move on a stage on which is figured the primitive world. Racine was thus perhaps a realist in the same sense as Rousseau.]

The problems presented in seventeenth-century French drama may all be described as problems of the will in and Harpagon, in fact, are made each to whip himself and his class, the false pietists, and the insanely covetous. Molière has only set them in motion. He strips Folly to the skin, displays the imposture of the creature, and is content to offer her better clothing, with the lesson Chrysale reads to Philaminte and Bélise. . . . His moral does not hang like a tail, or preach from one character cocking an eye at the audience, as in recent realistic French plays, but is in the heart of his work, throbbing with every pulsation of an organic structure. If life is likened to the comedy of Molière, there is no scandal in the comparison.' *The Idea of Comedy*, p. 25. 'Le rire,' says Bergson, 'est avant tout une correction. Fait pour humilier, il doit donner à la personne qui en est l'objet une impression pénible. La société se venge par lui les libertés qu'on a prises avec elle.' *Le Rire*, p. 201.

relation to reason and action. The particular illustration of this in the works of Corneille is made more striking when we remember the attention paid all through French society at that time to the relation of the will and passions in the individual.¹ And it was his observation of seventeenth-century drama that led Brunetière to formulate his Law of the Drama, by which this *genre* can be distinguished from the epic or novel.

Brunetière describes this law of the drama as that of the human will in action.² A novel, according to him, may represent circumstances as all-powerful and unresisted: the drama implies that the human will has been stimulated and is active. If the obstacle to be encountered is insurmountable, the conflict is a tragic one. If not, serious drama is the form taken. If the conditions of conflict are equal,

¹ See especially the theories of the Cartesian School, the Port-Royal controversy, Pascal's works. There are, too, many indications in the prefaces of Corneille and Racine of the importance given to the problem. Corneille, in the letter to 'Monsieur —', which precedes the early editions of *La Place Royale*, acknowledges his indebtedness to the theories of an anonymous friend on this subject. 'C'est de vous que j'ai appris que l'amour d'un honnête homme doit être toujours volontaire; qu'on ne doit jamais aimer en un point qu'on ne puisse n'aimer pas, que si on en vient jusque là, c'est une tyrannie dont il faut secouer le joug et qu'enfin la personne aimée nous a beaucoup plus d'obligation de notre amour, alors qu'elle est toujours l'effet de notre choix et de son mérite, que quand elle vient d'une inclination aveugle, et forcée par quelque ascendant de naissance à qui nous ne pouvons résister' (p. 220).

² '... dans le drame, bien loin d'accepter la loi des circonstances, ce sont les personnages qui la leur font, jusqu'à en mourir, s'il le faut, plutôt que de ne pas la leur faire, et qui les subordonnent ainsi aux exigences de leur volonté. Quand cela finit mal pour eux, dans la mort et dans le sang, c'est le drame; quand cela finit mieux, par le mariage, par exemple, c'est la comédie; quand cela finit moins bien,—mais au dépens de leur amour-propre ou de leur vanité plutôt que de leur bonheur ou de leur vie,—c'est le vaudeville. Mais, drame ou comédie, c'est toujours et partout la condition, la formule, et la loi de l'action dramatique.' Brunetière, *Les Époques du théâtre français*, p. 18.

comedy results: if the obstacle is imagined or absurd, farce is disengaged. 'All events oppose him,' says Goethe¹ of the hero of a play, 'and he either clears and removes every obstacle out of his path or else becomes their victim.' It has been noticed² that such a theory is wider than Hegel's, in fact includes it,³ and is close to Aristotle's, 'without action there cannot be a tragedy: there may be without characters.'⁴ Although it is therefore true that the real cause of dramatic action is primarily in the will itself, and not primarily in the conflict of the will,⁵ yet the fact remains that the will can only show itself in activity: and what seems at first sight to be a complex idea of the origin of the drama cannot be analysed into simpler elements. In the same way the idea of freedom is really inseparable from that of action. An active will, in so far as it is active, is a free will. This may explain Coleridge's assertion that in the tragic drama the free will of man is the cause.⁶

¹ *Wilhelm Meister*.

² Brander Matthews, *A Study of the Drama*.

³ Hegel dealt only with tragedy. See Bradley on Hegel: 'In all tragedy there is some sort of collision or conflict—conflict of feelings, modes of thought, desires, wills, purposes; conflicts of persons with one another, or with circumstances or with themselves, . . . pity for mere misfortune, like fear of it, is not tragic pity or fear, since these are due to the spectacle of the conflict and its attendant suffering, which do not appeal simply to our sensibilities or our instinct of self-preservation, but also to our deeper mind or spirit.' See also Brander Matthews, *A Study of the Drama*, pp. 99–100.

⁴ Prof. Margoliouth in his edition of the *Poetics* of Aristotle gives reasons for translating 'characters' instead of 'character', and for defining the word as 'psychological description' as opposed to plot or action.

⁵ Brander Matthews, *A Study of the Drama*, p. 102.

⁶ Coleridge, *Greek Drama*, p. 16 (Everyman's Library edition): 'Tragedy, indeed, carried the thoughts into the mythologic world, in order to raise the emotions, the fears, and the hopes, which convince the inmost heart that their final cause is not to be discovered in the limits of mere mortal life, and force us into a presentiment, however dim, of a state in which those struggles of inward free will with outward necessity, which form the true subject of the tragedian, shall be reconciled and solved—the enter-

While, however, the development of seventeenth-century drama in France has much that is in common with all great drama, and the Law of the Drama suggested by it is applicable to comedy and tragedy at all periods of history, there are some conditions of the French temperament, together with some limitations imposed by circumstances on the French stage, which have helped to give the French neo-classical drama characteristics which distinguish it from the forms of dramatic art in other countries.

In Spain and England the theatre was a popular amusement (until indeed in England the Puritan attitude to the stage broke our dramatic tradition for the time), but in France a sharp distinction existed between the public that attended the street farces and the public that came to see the plays of Corneille. This is said to have been caused by the interdiction in France after 1548 of popular representations of mystery plays.¹ In any case the audience in a French theatre was chiefly composed of learned and literary people. The appeal of the plays was of necessity therefore quite unlike the appeal of Shakespeare's. Except in the case of Molière's comedies, which had a different history from the drama of Corneille and Racine, the French audience did not exact the relief of farcical scenes with well-known allusions, nor that of a lyric element or of interspersed ballets, and the playwright could compose without enlarging his canvas to reach and interest every type of playgoer.

tainment of new comedy, on the other hand, remained within the circle of experience.'

¹ See Legouis's *Défense de la poésie française*, p. 97: 'La divergence des théâtres anglais et français qui avaient été identiques au moyen âge tient peut-être uniquement à ce règlement de police qui, pour éviter de trop graves désordres, fit interdire chez nous les représentations populaires des Mystères en 1548. Quand notre théâtre de la Renaissance se façonna, ce fut à neuf et à part, pour un public restreint d'humanistes parmi lesquels il y avait quelques pédants, et ce peuple n'eut plus pour lui que la farce.'

22 DRAMA OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

In these circumstances we can trace both gain and loss. The plays could be shapely, and not overburdened with irrelevant matter, and there was no temptation to the author to 'play to the gallery'. But as it needed the genius of a Shakespeare to combine poetry and farce on the Elizabethan stage, so it needed a special order of genius to combine strong emotional appeal with a taste that satisfied the fastidiousness of a French seventeenth-century learned audience. A deeper reason, however, underlies the distinction between the French neo-classical and the Elizabethan types of drama. In France the drama of the seventeenth century reflected not only the qualities particular to one kind of audience, but a set of characteristics that were derived from the national temperament.¹ [The logical character of the French mind, and the tendency to reason out problems of emotion and will, have had much to do with the type of drama presented to us in France.]

On the other hand there is a striking contrast in France between the acts of educated individuals, which are to a high degree conscious and consecutive, and those of individuals acting together in a mass. The action of the crowd is singularly irresponsible, and affected more fully than in England by that strange magnetic sympathy which catches like fire at times of excitement, and disperses with the same extraordinary rapidity. The psychology of a crowd has been described by Le Bon² and also by Davenport³ as 'strangely like that of primitive man'.⁴ 'Stimulation immediately begets action. Reason is in

¹ [The French need for a rational order of thought is thus reflected in French drama.] 'Mais nous, il nous faut de la raison, il nous en faut même dans le vaudeville et dans la farce, il nous en faut jusque dans les caricatures.' Stapfer, *Molière et Shakespeare*.

² *Psychologie des foules*.

³ *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals*, p. 26.

⁴ *Ibid.*

abeyance.’¹ ‘The volume of emotion too, is increased by the knowledge of its existence in others in a crowd.’ ‘As in the case of the primitive mind, imagination has unlocked the flood-gates of emotion, which on occasion may become wild enthusiasm or demoniac frenzy.’² The crowd, too, is easily acted upon by suggestion. Fear, primitive fear, emerges. As a consequence of these various strands of feeling, ‘the crowd presents itself as the great driving force, so to speak, of impulsive social action.’³ It has been noticed by critics of Le Bon’s book that the crowd he describes is emphatically a French crowd.⁴

The French writer and artist in setting the limitations of his subject, and in putting the frame round it, is moved by forces in his own nature which find a reflection in those of his characters, and have a correspondence with the world in which he lives.] He portrays a world on the stage in which, given the circumstances, the actions of individuals can be predicted with reasonable certainty, but it is one in which the crowd is magnetized, and thus appears irresponsible—and it is frequently the dreaded element which controls fortune or misfortune in the plays, even when it is not actually present on the stage. Compare this for a moment with the treatment of the crowd in a Shakespearean play. Apart from its function as representing certain popular views—and perhaps in some plays simulating the action of the Greek chorus—the crowd is despised in Shakespeare as something unstable, not to be believed in or depended upon. The allusions to the ‘hydra-headed multitude’, the words in *Julius Caesar* ending ‘Mischief, thou art afoot’,⁵ the

¹ *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals*, p. 27.

² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁴ ‘The Anglo-Saxon crowd is one thing: the Latin or Celtic crowd quite another.’ The French crowd is, as the French themselves say, *naturellement frondeur*.

⁵ Act iii, sc. 2.

tremendous attack in *Coriolanus* on 'the mutable, rank-scented many',¹ and especially Coriolanus's speech :

You are no surer, no,
Than is the coal of fire upon the ice,
Or hailstone in the sun . . .²

show that the crowd is there treated not as terrible and passionate and primitive in its vengeance, but as despicable and wavering.³ Though we have something like this in the Cornelian drama, more is made there of the swiftness of the excitement—passing like fire. Thus in *Horace*, *Le vieil Horace* says to his son :

Horace, ne crois pas que le peuple stupide
Soit le maître absolu d'un renom bien solide :
Sa voix tumultueuse assez souvent fait bruit ;
Mais un moment l'élève, un moment le détruit . . .⁴

In *Nicomède*, it is true, Arsinœe says :

J'ai prévu ce tumulte, et n'en vois rien à craindre,
Comme un moment l'allume, un moment peut l'éteindre—⁵

but her hope is too easy. In scene 4 occurs the passage :

Tout est perdu, Madame, à moins d'un prompt remède ;
Tout ce peuple à grands cris demande Nicomède ;
Il commence lui-même à se faire raison,
Et vient de déchirer Métrobate et Zénon.
Le premier sang versé rend sa fureur plus forte ;
Il l'amorce, il l'acharne, il en éteint l'horreur,
Et ne lui laisse plus ni pitié ni terreur.⁶

The crowd, in fact, is beyond the bounds of tragic restraint. The effect of the overmastering fear of the multitude is

¹ *Coriolanus*, act iii, sc. 1.

² *Ibid.*, act i, sc. 1.

³ See W. H. Courtney, *The Idea of Tragedy*, p. 62: 'I need not say how small a place in Shakespeare's theory of existence the people held. He is perpetually laughing at them, not only in *Julius Caesar*, but constantly through his histories, and above all in *Coriolanus*.'

⁴ *Horace*, act v, sc. 3.

⁵ *Nicomède*, act v, sc. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, sc. 4.

skilfully used in their plays by Corneille and Racine. So in *Britannicus*, the sombre crowd is represented as taking Junie under its protection and withdrawing her from the court.

Le peuple cependant, que ce spectacle étonne,
Vole de toutes parts, se presse, l'environne,
S'attendrit à ses pleurs ; et plaignant son ennui,
D'une commune voix la prend sous son appui ;
Ils la mènent au temple, où depuis tant d'années
Au culte des autels nos vierges destinées
Gardent fidèlement le dépôt précieux
Du feu toujours ardent qui brûle pour nos dieux.¹

Even the dreaded emperor dares not interfere ; Narcisse, who tries to do so, is slaughtered at once.

César les voit partir sans oser les distraire.
Narcisse, plus hardi, s'empresse pour lui plaire,
Il vole vers Junie, et sans l'épouvanter
D'une profane main commence à l'arrêter.
De mille coups mortels son audace est punie : -
Son infidèle sang rejaillit sur Junie.
César, de tant d'objets en même temps frappé,
Le laisse entre les mains qui l'ont enveloppée.²

In *Iphigénie*, Agamemnon, having explained to his daughter that his efforts to save her have been overborne by the gods, speaks of the unchained fury of the people when no longer restrained by the divine will.

Quel frein pourroit d'un peuple arrêter la licence,
Quand les dieux, nous livrant à son zèle indiscret,
L'affranchissent d'un joug qu'il portoit à regret ?³

That the fierce power of the crowd is more in evidence in the Racinian than in the Cornelian drama is due to Corneille's belief in the will-power of great individual men, who can, even in moments of crisis, compel the multitude. This appears, for example, in *Horace*.⁴

¹ *Britannicus*, act v, sc. 8.

² Ibid.

³ *Iphigénie*, act iv, sc. 4. See also the account of the *foule insensée*, which affects the action in *Bérénice*, act v, sc. 3.

⁴ *Horace*, act v, sc. 3.

What applies to the crowd applies also to the army.¹ A Henry V, who 'must bear all', who knows

What watch the King keeps to maintain the peace, controls his army, himself as patriot king, representing the national idea, but the army in Racine's *Iphigénie* is a blind force, which is roused to action by a sense of the defiance uttered to high heaven by Agamemnon: and its vengeance is only deflected by the oracle in the mouth of Calchas, that is, by external supernatural agency.

Ce n'est plus un vain peuple en désordre assemblé ;
C'est d'un zèle fatal tout le camp aveuglé.²

Déjà de tout le camp la discorde maîtresse
Avait sur tous les yeux mis son bandeau fatal,

Entre les deux partis Calchas s'est avancé
L'œil farouche, l'air sombre et le poil hérissé,
Terrible et plein du dieu qui l'agite sans doute :
'Vous, Achille,' a-t-il dit, 'et vous, Grecs, qu'on m'écoute :
Le dieu qui maintenant vous parle par ma voix
S'explique son oracle, et m'instruit de son choix.'³

The crowd or army in the French drama, as we have seen, is moved by the *âme de la foule* that is familiar to French psychology: and the expression of this in seventeenth-century plays was strengthened by contemporary historical experience of the behaviour of a crowd. The crowd represents in fact the primitive mind, while Corneille's drama shows the developed purposeful action of the individual, Racine's the *débâcle* when the inner control is removed.

¹ This is not surprising in an age when the recollection of a French army chiefly composed of mercenaries was strong in the minds of the people (e.g. the expedition to Jülich in 1610), and when the wars against the Huguenots, and France's part in the Thirty Years' War were followed by the Fronde. Paris remembered July 2, 1652, the sudden frenzy of the attack on Condé's army, and his retaliation and massacre of his opponents at the Hôtel de Ville.

² *Iphigénie*, act v, sc. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, sc. 6.

The limits thus consciously set by the French seventeenth-century dramatist were not only those springing naturally from the national temperament, they were also those which were a consequence of the relation of dramatic art to the life of the period.] The dramatist had to take into consideration [certain stage traditions], certain possibilities of the theatre which affected the technique and presentation of his plays.

The dramatic art of France cannot be dissociated from its production on the stage. The plays are not meant to be read at home, but to be presented in character, and to have the help of musical intonation and artistic gesture. The whole later development of French dramatic art bears the marks of the vitality poured into it by the three great playwrights, who wrote, in the one case (that of Molière) with complete knowledge of the stage from within, and in all cases with an ideal of the natural presentation of plays which had their root in the life of the day. There was, of course, [evolution in the development of the art]: Corneille, for instance, had the stage for *Le Cid* arranged in divisions that suggest a relation to the staging of the old moralities, which had bequeathed the tradition of the scene holding many 'mansions' to the Hôtel de Bourgogne.¹ Larivey wrote some of his dramas (his *Six premières comédies* and *Trois nouvelles comédies*) in prose, though the earliest known productions in prose on the stage (with the exception of the farces) were the comedies of Molière. Versions of Greek plays, too, had been freely made for the stage,² but it was reserved for Corneille to create a feeling for the tragedy of

¹ But in 1673-84 the note of the *mise-en-scène* is 'Le théâtre est une chambre à quatre portes. Il faut un fauteuil pour le roi.' Appendix to vol. i, Molière (*Les grands écrivains de la France*), p. 560.

² For example by Jean de la Taille, *Médée*, 1554; Charles Tontain, *Agamemnon*, 1556; F. le Duchat, *Agamemnon*, 1561; Robert Garnier, *Hippolyte*, 1573; *La Troade*, 1579; *Antigone*, 1580.

idea, which was in a truer sense related to Greek thought, and for Racine to recall a simplicity of action which was closer to Greek presentation than the other neo-classical plays which had been acted before their time. But although the revival of the drama had been thus prepared for,¹ and although we find traces of the older manner in the early work of Corneille, still many causes co-operated to make the seventeenth century the date of the true Renaissance of the drama in France. It is perhaps hardly necessary to allude here to more than two of them. One is the fact that trained professional actors had since the middle of the sixteenth century begun to occupy the French stage,² and that from the end of that century there was a tendency for the companies to establish themselves permanently in a given place. The theatre became Parisian.³ The other fact is the appeal made by the more serious drama to playgoers. Hardy's tragi-comedies mark the transition to the appreciation of solid dramatic work.⁴

¹ Du Bellay, *La Deffense et illustration de la langue francoyse*, book ii, chap. iv, first suggested the idea of a native French comedy and tragedy on a classical pattern. 'Quant aux comédies et tragédies, si les Roys et les républiques les vouloient restituer en leur ancien dignité, qu'ont usurpée les Farces et Moralitez, je seroy bien d'opinion que tu t'y employasses, et si tu le veux faire pour l'ornement de ta langue, tu sçais où tu en dois trouver les Archetypes.'

² See Sidney Lee, *The French Renaissance in England*, pp. 378-81.

³ In 1559 the Hôtel de Bourgogne was ceded by the Confrères de la Passion to the troupe which employed Alexandre Hardy to write plays for them. In 1661 Richelieu gave to the troupe of Molière the *salle* at the Palais Royal.

⁴ In the seventeenth century there was a growing tension between the patronage of the court and the patronage of the public. This comes to a head with Molière. After his troupe had been named in 1665 *troupe du roi*, a long and feverish dispute followed, which was only ended in 1669 by the king's permission being given for the free representation of *Tartufe*. The hand of the people had really forced the hand of the king. See E. Rigal, *Hardy et le théâtre français*, p. 688.

Life had indeed seized upon the French stage, and the tendency encouraged by her three great dramatists was to get rid of all conventions of presentation that were cramping and artificial. Here, however, a distinction was drawn. While the actor was freed in regard to his intonation and gesture, and the natural artistic sense of the French nation was called into play on the stage, the playwright was still bound, at any rate in tragedy, to the limits of the Alexandrine—and in both tragedy and comedy to a certain elevation of speech and manner which carried with it the conventional court dress, and to a setting of the play that recalled the regularity of Versailles. In these directions he had practically no choice. Conventional dress and scenery prevailed much longer on the French stage than conventional gesture or intonation. Racine was the first playwright to insist on his actors using natural inflexions instead of a stilted manner of voice-production which had apparently possessed the French theatre as it had done the English travelling companies parodied by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*: though the 'Ercles vein' of a famous actor (Montfleury) had encouraged Molière's satiric comment in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*.¹

The narrative monologue, too, tended to disappear in the seventeenth century, to the great gain of art. The inevitable stiffness of a recitation was succeeded by the quick give

¹ In the *Mercure de France*, mai 1738, pp. 820, 831, Montfleury is thus described:—'Il faisait des tirades de vingt vers de suite, et poussoit le dernier avec tant de véhémence, que cela excitoit des brouhahas et des applaudissements qui ne finissoient point. Il étoit plein de sentiments pathétiques, et quelquefois jusqu'à faire perdre la respiration aux spectateurs.'

'Le chant et l'emphase étoient le seul genre de déclamation qui fut alors connu. Molière, dans *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, osa en faire sentir le ridicule et y critiquer, entre autres, le ton emphatique et démoniaque de Montfleury dans la scène de Nicomède, où Prusias, représenté par cet acteur, s'entretient tout seul avec son capitaine de gardes.'

and take of influence between actors. The French actor reads on the faces of his companions the impression of his own lines, and thus communicates a sense of the reality of his art to the audience.¹ Natural, instead of artificial gesture, was encouraged. The power of communicating emotion with only just sufficient gesture to embody it, has become characteristic of the French actor who has the art of *laisser deviner ses nerfs*.² It is true that in classical tragedy Le Kain, Rachel, and in our day Mounet-Sully, had a declamatory method which they considered proper to tragedy, but the amount of gesture was so carefully proportioned (together with the inflexion of the voice), that we recognize their manner as true art. It is true, too, that natural gesture tends in France to become traditional,³ but each new inheritor of tradition has only accepted it after long and patient study, which is hardly to be guessed at by those only acquainted with more rapid dramatic methods.

Scenery and dress were slower in being adapted to the stage and to the assumed date of the play. While gesture and intonation became more natural, dress remained that of the period of representation, and no change to greater local colour or historical probability was suggested there.

WB This was partly owing to the strength of tradition and partly to the seventeenth-century idea that both tragedy and high comedy were the drama of noble minds, and should be set in refined surroundings. Dramatic aloofness was therefore suggested by the manner and dress of the

¹ This strictly diminishes the necessity for scenery.

² Blaze de Bury, *Racine and the French Classical Drama*.

³ As for example, Molé's gesture in *Le Misanthrope*, when, as Alceste, instead of extending his arms he folded them when saying :

Tous les hommes me sont à tel point odieux . . . ;

or again, the *accolade* to Martine at the end of *Les Femmes savantes*.

highest society. [The atmosphere of courtly grace lies about the famous tragedies of the period, though Corneille, long before Diderot, appealed to essential nobility of character rather than to aristocracy of birth, and suggested that kings and queens need not always be the mouthpieces for elevated sentiment.¹] A distinction as to dress was, however, drawn between comedy and tragedy. [Comedy was essentially (at any rate after Corneille) topical and of the period: but tragedy demanded a symbolic setting.²] Greek surroundings were indicated as on the Elizabethan stage by flinging a Roman toga over the court dress of the period. Hercules carried a club over his shoulder and wore a tiger-skin over his velvet coat.³ A warrior added a cuirass to his other clothes, and a Fury a green snake to her court dress. It is well known that Polyeucte drew off his white gloves and removed his plumed hat before uttering his last speech.

Rough screens painted with houses, colonnades, and with trees and sky served for the wings on Molière's stage. To us they are symbolic rather than realistic, but they represented the beginnings of the modern feeling for scenery, as this can be traced in the seventeenth century.⁴ Even so, the difference is immense between Molière's period and the present day. The onus of presenting a play in the usual conditions of the time lay, after all, wholly with the actor. Playing on a stage encumbered by a jesting and noisy audience,

¹ Préface de *Don Sanche d'Aragon*.

² 'Les personnages tragiques doivent être regardés d'un autre œil que nous ne regardons d'ordinaire les personnages que nous avons vus de si près.' *Bajazet*, Seconde Préface.

³ Le Kain was the first actor to discard the coat for the tiger-skin in the play of *Tancrède*, but he kept his curled and powdered wig. It is said that a less well-known actor was the first to succeed in appearing in the part of Hercules without a wig, but he brought the wig on to the scene in his hand, and only threw it away when he gathered the feeling of the audience from their applause.

⁴ After 1671 more elaborate scenery was used.

who even interfered with the entrances and exits,¹ and whose loud comments obscured his words, the actor had to depend on a beautiful and dramatic rendering of his part to secure attention ; he had to cultivate the instinct of seizing the key-note of character in however small a part, and of making the rest of his performance harmonize with it. The dramatist of the seventeenth century, we shall find, supplied this key-note even in his slightest studies.²

The conditions of the French stage in the seventeenth century did not then exclude the possibility of a thoroughly artistic rendering of dramatic work, but limits were set. It has been pointed out in a recent study of the drama,³ that the form and development of the French play-house was more favourable to a setting of the plays and to a certain remoteness from the realism of everyday conditions than was that of the Elizabethan stage. While the original frame of the Elizabethan stage was the inn courtyard open to the air, with its platform projecting well into the centre of the space, that of the French stage was the covered tennis court,⁴ which had to be artificially lighted, was

¹ This lasted into the eighteenth century. At a performance of Voltaire's *Sémiramis* at Versailles, the audience had to be asked to make room for the ghost, which could not arise from Ninus's tomb on account of the crowd on the stage. Blaze de Bury, *French Classical Drama*, p. 37. See Molière, *Les Fâcheux*, act i, sc. 1.

² So, for example, in the character of Agnès in *L'École des Femmes*, everything works up to and hinges upon her simple remark : ' Et pourquoi, s'il est vrai, ne le dirois-je pas ? ' *L'École des Femmes*, act v, sc. 4.

³ Brander Matthews, *A Study of the Drama*.

⁴ The French tennis courts were built on the outer side of the wall of Philippe-Auguste ; ' the players standing in the ditch outside the wall against which the ball was thrown. Beyond the ditch was built the court for onlookers, the common folk standing on its floors, their betters seated in the gallery. When the game lost its vogue, these courts were easily and cheaply turned into the rude theatres of that day, with abundant space for actors and spectators. . . . ' Martin, *The Stones of Paris*, vol. i, p. 111.

roofed in, and in which was set a long narrow stage comparatively unencumbered by scenery.¹ This was later on framed in by an arch-like structure, which helped the remote and pictorial effect. In the matter of staging, then, the limits were of a kind that could be turned to artistic account. When the crisis of the play was over it was easy to shut off the stage, and thus the French seventeenth-century play is without the later scenes which are necessary in a Shakespearean play to make the dispersal of the characters seem natural, and to effect a transition to the 'light of common day'.

From the seventeenth century onwards, partly owing to the influence of the opera, scenery and dress on the French stage became gradually more realistic:² but the artistic

¹ Except in the case of the comedies of Molière framed on the Italian model, for which he used the familiar 'sets' of solid wooden buildings with doors and a gallery and a painted scene as background.

² An interesting account of the stage of realism in scenery and dress reached on the French operatic stage by the next century is given in P. Fromageot's articles on 'L'Opéra à Versailles en 1770', published in *Versailles Illustré*, October, 1901 et seq. Lulli's opera, *Persée*, first represented in 1682, was printed in 1710, with an illustration of the stage setting and *décors*, which were neo-classic in type, and represented, as Fromageot says, 'une série d'édifices majestueux dans le goût de Mansart'. The costumes were also neo-classic. In 1770, sixty years later, the further attempts at realism in costume and scenery were described. A square 'de costume éthiopien' is to be flanked by an 'amphithéâtre à l'antique'. The scene is to be enlivened by dances carried out 'd'une manière noble et singulière'. The palaces are to have 'deux pavillons ornés de colonnes qui feront symétrie à la partie du milieu', thus showing true eighteenth-century taste, but an obelisk is to stand by, to suggest Ethiopia.

Similarly the chief characters wear the magnificent court dress of the time, the magnificence rather emphasized for stage effect; the lesser characters give the local colouring by wearing what is first described as the 'costume éthiopien', but which we are told may be allowed to be somewhat like 'habillements indiens'. In some cases we are told that the 'habits de costume éthiopien . . . pour la variété, pourraient se partager en habits indiens'. The original illustrations for these costumes still remain in the

quality of the French mind is shown now as in an earlier century, chiefly by perfection of intonation and gesture in the rendering of parts. The intimate connexion between French life and art has greatly helped this development.¹

Bibliothèque de l'opéra, and give an idea of the stage reached in 1770 in the transition between neo-classicism and realism.

¹ Dramatic art from the seventeenth century onwards has filled a very large part in the life and thought of the nation. Beaumarchais played out the monarchy; the opera went on in France during the Terror; Voltaire, in his Swiss retreat, entertained Le Kain, and amused his visitors with an amateur stage; in the days of the First Empire men went to the theatre and were interested in new actors *entre deux coups de canon*.

CHAPTER II

CORNEILLE AND THE FRENCH STAGE

THE drama of Corneille is generally judged entirely in its tragic character : but in trying to estimate his place in the history of the French drama it is important to remember that his work was experimental, [and his first successful experiment was also an independent one, viz. the production of the comedy—high or heroic in character—which marks the rise of comedy to a place of artistic importance on the French stage.]

Before the time of Corneille, the imitations of Latin comedy by Jodelle and others could not be fruitful for the progress of dramatic art, but there were elements of promise in Hardy, since his numerous experiments in tragedy, tragi-comedy, and pastoral were made with knowledge of the conditions of actors and audience, and contrived to hit the taste of the public, for which an ancient Latin literary form proved unsuitable.¹

Another attempt to cater for the taste of a section of the public, this time of the more educated type, was made after 1617, when the appearance of Italian actors, in the *commedia dell' arte*, delighted an audience which found a pleasure in quips and conceits, and disdained the rough and tumble of

¹ Shakespeare and Molière are standing examples of the sensitiveness of the dramatic artist to the inspiration and feeling of the crowd, and also to the limitations which are a direct consequence of the necessity of dramatic appeal. Both Shakespeare and Molière recognize the aid given by the genius of the actor to the artist in the building up of plays (the possibility of finding a satisfactory interpreter of a special type of character has moulded many scenes—and from the point of view of dramatic art, justifiably so); for as with the appeal to the audience it is a recognition both of inspiration received and of limitations set.

the French farce, which was mixed with the popular drama of Hardy.¹ Two types of drama were then rivals for favour, but they made an appeal to different sections of the public : the weakness lay in the preciousness of the one and the coarseness of the other.

✓ Corneille's first effort at comedy combined the better elements of the Italian *commedia*, an ingenious intrigue, with the better elements of the picture of French social life, hitherto only reflected in the pastoral. Sometimes he leaned more decidedly to intrigue, as in *La Veuve* ; sometimes the idea of the pastoral dominated him, as in *Clitandre* ; sometimes a third element, that of Spanish heroic story, which also had had its share in the formation of the tragi-comedy, made its appearance, remarkably so in the romantic drama of *Le Cid*.

The first step was taken in the slight play of *Mélite* (1629). Here the elements of the comic drama can be traced : the intrigue was slight, but the plot, it was said by contemporaries, had been suggested by personal feeling and experience. The play respected decency, and appealed to the better section of the playgoing public. The second step was the invention of *Clitandre*, which satisfied the intrigue-lovers of the time ; lastly, in *La Veuve* was produced a comedy of manners which was close to French life, and in which the interest of character dominated that of intrigue. *La Galerie du Palais* and *La Place Royale* suggested a realistic treatment, which was only shorn of its effect by the declamatory method of the actors and the conventionalism of the stage-setting.

Corneille's success was emphasized by the action of Richelieu, who wished to attach the new comic dramatist

¹ There is a great likeness between Hardy's tragi-comedies and the Elizabethan 'lamentable tragedies mixed full of pleasant mirth' against which Marlowe protested in England.

to his service, and engage him, together with Bois-Robert, Colletet, L'Étoile, and Rotrou, to write poetic drama for his private theatre. [However, he found Corneille difficult to mould; he remarked that he was wanting in *esprit de suite*, and Corneille, after writing the third act of the *Tuilleries*, was consigned to his provincial surroundings again. Corneille's plays were, however, performed with success at the Théâtre du Marais¹: and the author, without jealously attacking the authors of tragi-comedy and pastoral, set himself to break the bonds of adherence to Seneca and to Aristotle.]

With this idea in view, he re-wrote the plot of the *Medea*. In the *Examen* he explained that the incantations of the sorceress could hardly be suitably presented in a public square, and therefore he preferred to abandon the unity of place. By this time, though the *Médée* was not a success, the comedy of Corneille had taken its place as a comedy of manners reflecting French society,² and an *arrêt du Conseil d'État* (1635) gave the actor's profession a definitely better status. The occasion was the performance of *L'Illusion Comique*, in which there is a play within the play, and actors represent actors on the stage. One of these actors, the 'Matamore' of Spanish comedy, gave in an exaggerated form the impression of the type from which Rodrigue in *Le Cid* was afterwards developed. [In *Le Cid* we have the force and purity of the Cornelian drama, combined with form and expression, feeling and thought of a high order, and the stamp of a new type of high comedy is definitely set.]

The subject was one which excited interest in an aristocratic society where love of adventure and a reckless disregard of consequences existed side by side with class pride

¹ The site of which was close to the Hôtel de Guise, now the Musée des Archives. The old entrance corresponds to that of No. 90 Rue Vieille du Temple.

² Preface to *La Suivante* (1633-34).

and prejudice and fine-drawn distinctions of honour. The picture was attractive both in its realism and in its suggestion. Foreigners as well as Frenchmen, and the large Spanish society in Paris, took up the play. [The fashion of speaking of high ideals of honour and duty expressed in faultless form as *beau comme le Cid*, excited Richelieu (who had his vanity as a Maecenas of Literature) to attack the author in a vulnerable point. The pedants were at that time treating the deductions of Aristotle from Greek tragedy with the respect due to natural law. It was pointed out to them by Scudéry, under Richelieu's influence, that the subject-matter and treatment of the *Cid* were outside conventional limits of topic and form.¹ Corneille at first made no reply, but an anonymous pamphlet, the *Défense du Cid*, was attributed to him, and a shower of criticism that Scudéry let fall obliged Corneille to some kind of answer.

Scudéry's *Observations* attacked *Le Cid* on many different grounds, and if we fairly consider his criticism, it is directed largely against the romantic element in the play. Intrigue was the note of comedy in Scudéry's eyes. Thus he asserted that the conclusion of the play was too rapidly foreseen, besides being too much outside the conventional morality of the heroic drama, which would have forbidden Chimène to marry the *Cid*.² The further complaint that the action

¹ *Observations sur le Cid*. 'Je prétends donc prouver contre cette pièce du *Cid* :

Que le sujet n'en vaut rien du tout,

Qu'il choque les principales règles du Poème dramatique,' &c.

² . . . Il faut que le premier acte, dans cette espèce de Poème, embrouille une intrigue, qui tienne toujours l'esprit en suspens et qui ne se démêle qu'à la fin de tout l'ouvrage. Ce nœud Gordien n'a pas besoin d'avoir un Alexandre dans le *Cid* pour le dénouer : le père de Chimène y meurt presque dès le commencement ; dans toute la Pièce, elle ni Rodrigue ne poussent et ne peuvent pousser qu'un seul mouvement ; on n'y voit aucune diversité, aucune intrigue, aucun nœud. Et le moins clairvoyant des spectateurs devine, ou plutôt voit, la fin de cette aventure aussitôt qu'elle

It takes place in an undefined space shows that the traditional setting of plays in the Hôtel de Bourgogne was considered old-fashioned, and Corneille in using the old setting had transgressed what seemed to be the trend of popular taste.¹

Chapelain's voice in the *Sentiments de l'Académie sur le Cid*, while acknowledging the existence of sufficient intrigue in the plot, agrees with the denunciations of Scudéry, and considers Chimène's yielding to passion as scandalous. Both writers claim that here Corneille departs from the true function of a poet, which is, to be didactic.² Even historical truth in the drama should, Chapelain thinks, be sacrificed to *bienséance*.³ But he at any rate avows an inexplicable charm in the play.⁴

The somewhat long and confusing history of the dispute about the *Cid* has therefore this interest for us : it marks the shock which Corneille's freshness and independence had caused a critical society which held a definite view about the moral function of the stage, and also a view of the necessity of artistic restraint. With both of these views Corneille would have agreed. But he saw the larger issues

est commencée . . . J'ajoute . . . qu'il est vrai que Chimène épousa le Cid, mais qu'il n'est point vraisemblable qu'une fille d'honneur épousa le meurtrier de son Père' (Scudéry).

¹ 'Disons encore que le théâtre en est si mal entendu, qu'un même lieu représentant l'appartement du Roi, celui de l'Infante, la maison de Chimène et la rue, presque sans changement de face, le spectateur ne sait le plus souvent où sont les acteurs' (Ibid.).

² 'Ces pernicious exemples rendent l'ouvrage notablement défectueux, et s'écarterent du but de la poésie, qui veut être utile : ce n'est pas que cette utilité ne se puisse produire par de mauvaises mœurs, il faut qu'à la fin elles soient punies, et non récompensées comme elles le font en cet ouvrage' (Chapelain).

³ 'Il faut que la créance qu'on lui donne soit aveugle, et la déférence que l'historien doit à la vérité le dispense de celle que le poète doit à la bienséance' (Ibid.).

⁴ 'Cet agrément inexplicable qui se mêle dans tous ses défauts . . .' (Ibid.).

in the development of a Christian, moral, and philosophic idea in drama, while his critics had become entangled in the effort to reduce everything to rule. Thus Corneille's *Lettre apologétique* was a violent satire and invective against Scudéry,¹ and he followed it up by a travesty of the device of the *Observations* :

Et Poète et Guerrier
Il aura du laurier,

in a set of verses in this strain :

Mon livre, dès l'abord, fait savoir, à qui lit,
Combien je suis grand capitaine.

As Corneille had also attacked a minor writer, Claveret, with *rancune* for his scandalous abuse, the quarrel became fiercer and more unrestrained in its recriminations. Feeling became heated to such a point that Mairet and Charleval would have used personal violence if Scudéry had not intervened. It was in vain that *La Voix publique et l'Inconnu et Véritable Ami de MM. de Scudéry et Corneille* tried to call the opponents to order : a mass of libels continued to be put out. Some of these letters, mostly anonymous, confined themselves to calling Corneille an imbecile, and his work *plat* and *fade* ; and Claveret assured him that the approbation he had gained for the *Cid* was 'la même que l'on donne au plus froid bouffon ou chanteur de vaudeville qui arrête les passants sur le Pont-Neuf . . .',² but other

¹ ' Pour me faire croire ignorant vous avez tâché d'imposer aux simples, et avez avancé des maximes de théâtre de votre seule autorité, dont quand elles seraient vraies, vous ne pourriez tirer les conséquences que vous en tirez : vous vous êtes fait tout blanc d'Aristote, et d'autres auteurs que vous ne lûtes et n'entendîtes peut-être jamais, et qui vous manquent tous de garantie : vous avez fait le censeur moral pour m'imputer de mauvais exemples : vous avez épluché les vers de ma pièce, jusqu'à en accuser un manque de césure : si vous eussiez su les termes de l'art, vous eussiez dit qu'il manquait de repos en l'hémistiche,' &c. . . .
Lettre apologétique du Sr Corneille.

² *Lettre du Sr Claveret à Monsieur de Corneille.*

writers took a more calm and critical view. *La Défense du Cid* is more an attack on the bad faith of Scudéry than a defence of Corneille: but a writer who signed himself *Le Bourgeois de Paris*, and by internal evidence was probably Charles Sorel, took an independent and humorous point of view, tilted against the heroics of Corneille, and showed up all the *non sequitur* of the play.¹ It is to be noticed that in all these cases reasonable action and moral purpose are what the critics of the seventeenth century allege should be expected in good drama.

Finally, Richelieu realized that it was time to modify this frenzied paper war, and ordered Bois-Robert to stop Mairet from making any further demonstration. Corneille then resigned himself with difficulty to the decision of the Academy, and Chapelain was chosen to give a criticism and appreciation of his play in the *Sentiments sur le Cid*. The submission of personal taste to the idea of authority, royal and ministerial authority, is nowhere more strongly shown than in a letter from Chapelain to Bois-Robert urging him to intercede for him with Richelieu, and regretting if he had expressed himself too favourably in the *Sentiments sur le Cid*.²

¹ 'Les personnages de cette pièce semblent tous être des fous, si on examine leurs actions et leurs paroles. Il les faut considérer les uns après les autres. Le roi dit qu'il a prévu la vengeance dès qu'il a su l'affront, et qu'il a voulu prévenir ce malheur. Toutefois, il n'en a rien fait, se contentant d'envoyer vers le Comte sans l'arrêter. Puis sur sa réponse, il dit qu'il faut s'assurer de lui, quand il a eu l'avis d'un dessin des Maures, et qu'il ne faut rien négliger; toutefois il ne donne aucun ordre, et dit que pour cette nuit cela troublerait la Ville, cependant sans Rodrigue tout était perdu,' &c.

'... Voilà de fort raisonnables personnages' (*Le Jugement du Cid par un bourgeois de Paris, marguillier de sa paroisse*).

² '... Mais si son Éminence juge que les moyens que j'avais pris pour le mieux ne fussent pas légitimes, assurez-la que je n'ai nul attachement à mes opinions et que je suis dans la soumission et la déférence que tout homme de bon sens doit avoir pour les sentiments d'une si haute intelli-

Corneille's natural disappointment at the moderate and cautious tone of the *Sentiments sur le Cid* was soon alleviated by the appearance of *Les Observations sur les Sentiments de l'Académie*, in which the public at last really expressed its taste, and enabled Boileau to sum up the net result of the discussion.

En vain contre le Cid un ministre se ligue,
Tout Paris pour Chimène a les yeux de Rodrigue,
L'Académie en corps a beau le censurer,
Le public révolté s'obstine à l'admirer.

'Savoir gagner les cœurs', says the author of the *Observations*, 'c'est une divine science qui n'est sujette aux règles ni aux lois de la poésie.'¹ 'Vous pourriez dire', said Balzac in a letter to Scudéry, 'que d'avoir satisfait tout un Royaume est quelque chose de plus grand et de meilleur que d'avoir fait une pièce régulière.'

But the mixture of envy and jealousy, the virulent and coarse abuse, the suggestion that the *Cid* was merely an adaptation of Guilhen de Castro—and that the cast was solely responsible for the success of the play²—all this had so discouraged Corneille that it was two years before he ventured to present *Horace* to the public.

This time he took a subject which would be recognized by the critics of the day as proper to the tragic drama, and he dedicated the play to Richelieu, not out of literary subservience, but out of his real conservative feeling for the authority of the state. Though *Horace* thrills with patriotic

gence que la Sienne et que je suis pour les suivre et m'y conformer entièrement . . .' (*Lettre de Chapelain à Bois-Robert*, 31 juillet 1637).

¹ *Observations sur les Sentiments de l'Académie Française*.

² Souvenez-vous que la conjoncture du temps, l'adresse et la honte des acteurs, tant à la bien représenter qu'à la faire valoir par d'autres inventions étrangères, que le Sr. de Mondory n'entend guère moins bien son métier, ont été les plus riches ornements du *Cid* et les premières causes de sa fausse réputation . . .' (*Réponse à l'Ami du Cid*).

feeling, and exhales the same atmosphere of heroic virtue as the *Cid*, the success at the time was only moderate, and this was attributed by contemporaries to the *dénouement*, the murder of Camille by her brother Horace. Chapelain expressed this view in a letter to Balzac.¹ Corneille, in fact, heard rumours that new *Observations* were on the way, and defended himself in advance by saying 'Horace fut condamné par les Duumvirs, mais il fut absous par le Peuple'. However, from this time onwards Richelieu was Corneille's protector,² and the two facts of his attack on the poet and later defence of him came out in the well-known quatrain after the death of the great Cardinal, when Corneille refused to say good or evil of the man who had done so much to harm and to help him.³

Cinna followed on *Horace*, and was a much greater success. Balzac's letter marks one or two interesting points of criticism. 'Vous nous faites voir', he says, 'Rome tout

¹ 'Dès l'année passée je lui dis qu'il fallait changer son cinquième acte des *Horaces* et lui dit par le menu, comment, à quoi il avait résisté toujours depuis, quoique tout le monde lui criât que sa fin était brutale et froide, et qu'il en devait passer par mon avis. Enfin, de lui-même, il me vint dire qu'il se rendait et qu'il le changerait et que ce qu'il ne l'avait pas fait, était parce que, en matière d'avis, il craignait toujours qu'on ne lui donnât par envie et pour détruire ce qu'il avait bien fait.'

² Le Cardinal de Richelieu témoigna ainsi prendre plaisir à tous les beaux ouvrages que M. Corneille continua de faire' (Sorel, *Bibliothèque française*).

³ Qu'on parle mal ou bien du fameux Cardinal,
Ma prose ni mes vers n'en diront jamais rien :
Il m'a fait trop de bien pour en dire du mal,
Il m'a fait trop de mal pour en dire du bien.

And in another poem, to be found in the *Trésor Chronologique et Historique*, 1643-7, Corneille speaks thus :

Moi, je n'étaie point d'illustres déplaisirs,
D'ambitieux regrets ni de pompeux soupirs,
Comme de ton vivant, je m'obstine à me taire,
Et quand quelqu'un s'efforce à couronner ta mort,
J'estime son ardeur sans suivre son effort
Et je dis qu'il fait bien, mais je pense mieux faire.

ce qu'elle peut être à Paris, et vous ne l'avez point brisée en la remuant.' While recalling the spirit of antiquity, it is in the setting of modern Paris that Corneille has given effect to his thought. Balzac notices, too, the noble creation of Émilie, one of Corneille's most striking heroines, and sees that she is a type and symbol of liberty as well as a woman.¹

Polyeucte, which followed upon *Cinna*, had a very different history. Although the penetrating beauty of the play had an immediate effect on all who read it, it was nearly barred from the stage by the dictum of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. Voiture was sent to explain to Corneille that the subject, being Christian, was a bar to its representation; and the actors were as slow to undertake it as the critics had been to encourage its performance. Dalibray, however, sounded the more general opinion when he approved of the play on account of its really moral tendency.² Those who were not able to admire the psychological development in *Polyeucte* and preferred the more turgid and heroic style, hailed with pleasure *La Mort de Pompée*.

¹ He puts the remark in the mouth of a learned man who is his neighbour: 'Un docteur de mes voisins, qui se met d'ordinaire sur le haut style, en parle, certes, d'une étrange sorte . . . Il se contentait le premier jour de dire que votre Émilie était la rivale de Caton et de Brutus dans la passion de la liberté. A cette heure, il va bien plus loin: tantôt il la nomme la possédée du démon de la République, et quelque-fois la belle, la raisonnable, la sainte et l'adorable furie . . .' (*Lettre de Balzac à Corneille*).

² Honte du temps passé, merveille de notre âge,
Exemple inimitable à la postérité.
Il ne te restait plus qu'à faire un saint ouvrage,
Pour te mieux assurer de l'immortalité.
Tu l'as fait, cher Corneille, et sans apprentissage,
Ce chef-d'œuvre qu'en vain d'autres avaient tenté.
Aux yeux mêmes du Ciel, tu rends la scène sage,
Et la fait sans dégoût parler de piété.
Toi seul a rencontré cet art si souhaité
Qui sait mettre l'utile avec le délectable:
Polyeucte, à la fois, nous charme et nous instruit . . .

Immediately after this Corneille broke entirely new ground with *Le Menteur*, the first of the comedies of manners on the French stage. *La Suite du Menteur* appeared soon after, and though to modern taste inferior to the earlier comedy, was soon more popular with the public.

Corneille now returned to another *genre*, and attempted again to put the epic of Christianity on the stage: but the subject of *Théodore*, that of prostitution, prevented the play from being accepted as a fit drama for presentation. He had, however, composed *Rodogune*, a play which the poet himself ranked very high among his own productions,¹ owing to the progressive character of the emotional interest in it: and this was followed by *Héraclius*, of which again Corneille approved on account of the unexpected *dénouement* of the tragedy. Both received well-deserved approbation. Corneille was perhaps in 1646 at the height of his fame. Thus Rotrou alludes to him in the *Véritable Saint Genest* as the great man who had brought *l'esprit romain* in its beauty on to the French stage.²

It was long, however, before the prejudices of the Académie yielded to his merit. Corneille had the mortification of seeing inferior men preferred to him on several occasions, but finally, in 1647, he was admitted.³

As time went on, the general enthusiasm for Corneille

¹ *Examen de Rodogune*.

² Nos plus nouveaux sujets, les plus dignes de Rome,
Et les plus grands efforts des veilles d'un grand homme,
A qui les rares fruits que la Muse produit
Ont acquis dans la scène un légitime bruit,
Et de qui certes l'art comme l'estime est juste,
Portent les noms fameux de Pompée et d'Auguste.
Ces poèmes sans prix où son illustre main
D'un pinceau sans pareil a peint l'esprit romain,
Rendront de leurs beautés votre oreille idolâtre,
Et sont aujourd'hui l'âme et l'amour du théâtre.

Act i, sc. 5.

³ Pélisson, in his history of the Académie, gives the details of these intrigues.

somewhat cooled. But in two different directions he made new experiments, one of which was a success and one a failure. They however marked out the modern possibilities of the drama. *Andromède* was, as Corneille himself proudly said, a great spectacle: 'l'un des plus beaux spectacles que la France ait vus.'¹ It was quite outside the rules of the drama, as the regular form of verse was rejected. But it had a realistic and complicated stage-setting; and the 'machines' for working this, and the fact that Pegasus was represented by a live horse, had a great deal to do with the public excitement and interest.² *Don Sanche d'Aragon* was an experiment of a different kind. It was a romantic and popular drama, more modern in some of its aspects than the rest of Corneille's work,³ but it was badly received in Paris, and Corneille attributed this to the malice of a powerful person, probably the Prince de Condé. Certainly in the provinces the same play met with success and approbation.

Nicomède, on the historical lines of *Cinna* and *Héraclius*, had less dramatic force, and *Pertharite* was a failure. Corneille at the early age of forty-four gave up writing for the stage, and devoted himself to a version of the *Imitation of Christ*.

After six years' interval he returned to his *métier*, finding that rapid changes of thought had taken place, and that the

¹ *Dédicace d'Andromède*.

² See e.g. Renaudot, *Gazette de France*, where he describes the enthusiasm of the audience, and Donneau de Visé, *Mercure Galant*, 1682: 'Comme on renchérit toujours sur ce qui a été fait, on a représenté le cheval Pégase par un véritable cheval, ce que n'avait jamais été fait en France. Il joue admirablement bien son rôle, et fait en l'air tous les mouvements qu'il pourrait faire sur terre.'

³ 'Voici un poème d'une espèce nouvelle, et qui n'a point d'exemple chez les anciens. Vous connoissez l'humeur de nos François; ils aiment la nouveauté; et je hasarde *non tam meliora quam nova*, sur l'espérance de les mieux divertir' (*Épître à Monsieur de Zuylichem*).

[psychologic and dramatic movement he himself had set going had continued its course during the interval.] On the other hand, personal feeling had become less acute, and he was not opposed by the old force of criticism. Among the subjects which preoccupied the minds of thinkers of all types was that of the freedom of the will.] The Cornelian drama was woven round this subject, dealing with it in the comedies as at war with compelling circumstances, and in the tragedies as triumphing over all hindrances and turning defeat into a spiritual victory. When the minister Fouquet recalled Corneille and proposed for his choice certain subjects for the drama, Corneille chose that of *Œdipe*, which again centred in the theory of the will of man. He had, as he said in his epistle to the minister,

. . . encore la main qui crayonna
L'âme du grand Pompée et l'esprit de Cinna.¹

His next effort was to reproduce one of the spectacles that had before delighted a Parisian audience. *La Conquête de la Toison d'Or* was written on the occasion of the peace with Spain and the marriage of Louis XIV. When it was first represented in 1660 by the actors of the Marais Theatre at the Marquis de Sourdiac's château at Neubourg, Donneau de Visé tells us that the marquis gave the actors 'toutes les machines et toutes les décorations qui avaient servi à ce grand spectacle.'²

Other plays followed rapidly : *Sertorius*, which aroused the admiration of Turenne and the praise of contemporary writers ;³ *Othon*, which also had a success in high quarters,

¹ *Vers à Fouquet*, lines 35 and following.

² *Mercure Galant*, mai 1695.

³

Le grand Sertorius
Qu'au Marais du temple l'on joue,
Sujet que tout le monde avoue
Être supérieurement traité.

Loret, *Muse historique*.

Louvois and the Duc de Grammont showing their appreciation of its moral beauty. The public feeling for Corneille and his works, as gathered from the letters and memoirs of the time, was now again at a climax. The people applauded then—as they still do—the fine passages: and Perrault tells us that when Corneille himself was present the acclamations were overwhelming.¹ Donneau de Visé reports that his position was considered to be *au-dessus de l'envie*.²

This secure popularity was, however, threatened by the appearance of Corneille's play, *Sophonisbe*. He had chosen, somewhat unwisely, as Mairet was his enemy, the subject which had gained for Mairet his popularity and renown:³ and thus given an opportunity to a cabal of critics who were lying in wait to lessen Corneille's influence, and whom the latter did not sufficiently propitiate by consulting them. The Abbé d'Aubignac, author of a book on the *Pratique du Théâtre*, and himself full of the theories attributed to Aristotle and to Scaliger, was one of the most influential of these critics, and attacked *Sophonisbe*. Donneau de Visé himself had struck the first blow, but on D'Aubignac's assuming the offensive, defended Corneille,⁴ that author meanwhile carefully keeping out of the way of those who were fighting the duel for his fame.

To D'Aubignac's theory of the author's monopoly of a subject, De Visé replied by showing that the great subjects

¹ ' . . . Lorsque par hasard il paraissait lui-même sur le théâtre, la pièce étant fini, les exclamations redoublaient et ne finissaient point qu'il ne fût retiré, ne pouvant plus soutenir le poids de tant de gloire ' (Perrault, *Hommes Illustres*).

² *Nouvelles Nouvelles*.

³ ' Les personnes d'honneur n'ont pas approuvé . . . que M. Corneille ait pris ce sujet que M. Mairet avait autrefois mis sur le Théâtre assez heureusement, c'était une matière consommée, à laquelle il ne fallait pas toucher. La croyance de mieux faire que tous les autres ne devait pas soulever M. Corneille contre un homme mort au Théâtre ' (Première Dissertation, *Critique de Sophonisbe*, Abbé d'Aubignac).

⁴ *Défense de Sophonisbe*.

of literature are common property, and to D'Aubignac's fixed rules of tragedy-making he replied by showing how Corneille's plays developed in a natural and logical way.¹ D'Aubignac's virulent criticism was not, however, checked. He turned it on *Sertorius* and on *Œdipe*: and threatened a campaign against all the series of plays from the *Cid* onwards (the earlier ones he thought below contempt). The chief interest of the dispute lies in the ground taken by De Visé, that actual knowledge of the conditions of the theatre is a better guarantee of good dramatic work than the theories of Aristotle and Scaliger as retailed by D'Aubignac.² Such violent enmity, hardly to be called criticism, was only noticed by Corneille in the frontispiece of his *Œuvres Diverses*, where he had himself represented as trampling envy under his feet. But a more deadly enemy to his fame appeared in the growing tendency of the French nation to prefer an operatic spectacle, or a love-story full

¹ ' . . . Depuis quand ne peut-on, sans vanité, travailler sur un sujet qui a été traité par un autre, vingt-huit ou trente ans auparavant ? Est-il quelqu'un qui ignore que la mode a établi son empire en France ? Que M. de Mairet n'a travaillé que pour son temps, et que M. Corneille pouvait travailler pour celui-ci sur le même sujet sans rien diminuer de la gloire de l'Auteur de l'ancienne *Sophonisbe* ? Ne sait-on pas bien qu'un même sujet peut fournir des pensées différentes, non seulement à deux, mais à plusieurs auteurs . . . Si tous ceux qui viennent sur la scène disaient en entrant, je viens d'un tel lieu, et je vous viens trouver dans votre chambre pour un tel sujet, l'on n'entendrait autre chose que de pareils discours, tant que durerait la pièce, cela paraîtrait ridicule et affecté et l'on connaîtrait que l'auteur manque d'adresse . . . je ne sais pas comment une personne qui croit si bien savoir ces sortes de choses, ne s'est pas aperçue de l'art avec lequel M. de Corneille manie ces endroits ' (Donneau de Visé, 'Nouvelles Nouvelles', *Défense de la Sophonisbe*).

² ' Selon votre grotesque raisonnement si un paysan qui pourrait juger de la bonne ou mauvaise façon de ses sabots, venait à la Comédie, vous voudriez qu'il put pareillement juger de la bonté de la pièce aussi bien que MM. de Corneille, Boyer et Quinault, qui ont non seulement une parfaite connaissance du Théâtre, mais qui nous font souvent voir des Poèmes dramatiques qui sont estimés de tout le monde . . . ' (Donneau de Visé).

of *galanterie*. By these influences interest was detached from the great mainspring of Corneille's *Théâtre*. In 1668, after the unfortunate plays of *Agésilas* and *Attila* had been written, Scarron said :

De Corneille les comédies,
Si magnifiques, si hardies,
De jour en jour baissent de prix.

It was at this time that Corneille, in a letter to St. Évremond, spoke of the passion of love as 'trop chargé de faiblesse pour être la dominante dans une pièce héroïque.' He wishes 'qu'il y serve d'ornement et non pas de corps'. However, the appearance of Racine and the success of *Andromaque*, produced in Corneille a wish to show his power in a new field, and though exempt from any form of personal jealousy,¹ Corneille incautiously took up the gauntlet thrown to rouse the two poets by Henriette d'Angleterre, and opposed his *Tite et Bérénice* to Racine's *Bérénice*. A parody of the time, called *Tite et Titus ou les deux Béréenices*, regrets the incident, and especially laments that a subject which is historical rather than poetical should have been chosen for the rival dramas.² It is noticeable from this time onwards that contemporary criticism compares the two dramatists. Thus Boileau eulogizes Racine at the expense of Corneille. Corneille himself and his friends and admirers claim to discover in Racine the want of an historic sense : his characters, be they Greek, Roman, or Turk, have all, they say, *l'âme française*.³ This is exactly the reproach which Fénelon

¹ 'Corneille était incapable d'une basse jalousie' (*Lettre de Valincour à l'abbé d'Olivet*).

² In the parody the two sets of characters each consider the others to be fraudulent, and Apollo, when he is asked to pronounce judgement, does so in the following words : 'Mais les uns et les autres auraient mieux fait de se tenir au pays d'Histoire dont ils sont originaires que d'avoir voulu passer dans l'Empire de Poésie à quoi ils n'étaient nullement propres . . .' (*Tite et Titus ou les deux Béréenices*).

³ 'Étant une fois près de Corneille sur le théâtre, à une représentation

makes to Corneille : the want of historic proportion in the delineation of character.¹

The situation between the two rivals became acute, and Corneille in turn showed his power of meeting Racine on his own ground, in the charming lines of *Psyche*, written in collaboration with Molière ; and he blazed out in fervent defence of his doctrine of heroic duty and its power over passion. So in *Suréna* he makes Eurydice say :

Le devoir vient à bout de l'amour le plus ferme.

Pulchérie again illustrates the supremacy of political duty over love, and was a great success, though *Suréna* was a failure, and marked his definitive retirement from the dramatist's profession. Yet during the ten years that passed between the failure of *Suréna* and Corneille's death, he still had the sympathy of a public, among whom could be counted a man like St. Évremond, and a woman like Madame de Sévigné ;² he was sure of the preference of the Court for his plays, and the admiration of a more general public, which felt that he had expressed some of the nobler sides of the French nature. When, on Thomas Corneille's

de *Bajazet*, il me dit : " Je me garderais bien de le dire à d'autres que vous, parce qu'on pourrait croire que j'en parle par jalousie ; mais prenez-y garde, il n'y a pas un seul personnage dans ce *Bajazet* qui ait les sentiments qu'il doit avoir et que l'on a à Constantinople ; ils ont tous sous un habit turc, le sentiment qu'on a au milieu de la France." Il avait raison, et l'on ne voit pas cela dans Corneille : le Romain y parle comme un Romain, le Grec comme un Grec, l'Indien comme un Indien, et l'Espagnol comme un Espagnol ' (Segrais, *Mémoires et Anecdotes*).

¹ ' Il me paraît qu'on a donné souvent aux Romains un discours trop fastueux. Ils pensaient hautement, mais ils parlaient avec modération ' (Fénelon, *Lettre à l'Académie*).

² ' Ma fille, gardons-nous bien de lui comparer Racine, sentons-en la différence . . . Vive donc notre vieil ami Corneille ! Pardonnons-lui de méchants vers, en faveur des divines et sublimes beautés qui nous transportent : ce sont des traits de maître qui sont inimitables. Despréaux le dit encore plus que moi, c'est le bon goût, tenons-y ' (*Lettre de Mme de Sévigné à Mme de Grignan*, 16 mars 1672).

entry into the Academy, Racine had the opportunity of eulogizing the great Corneille, he spoke of him with the intimate conviction that Corneille was the greater spirit, and that his works would survive.¹

In estimating their general value we cannot, however, help being struck by the way in which, up to *Polyeucte*, Corneille's heroes mount from height to height of spiritual conquest: after *Polyeucte* the last word has been said; the old situations are reproduced, but the *élan* has been lost. Thus in the play of *Le Cid*, love stands between the hero and his duty, and duty and honour, as Rodrigue and Chimène understand them, gain the day.² In *Horace* a wider problem appears: between the hero and the accomplishment of his spiritual destiny stands the love of the family: and Horace sacrifices his sister Camille, who has put her love for Curiace before the glory of the family and the nation.³ In *Cinna* the State disputes the possession of the 'undivided soul' of the hero: and in *Polyeucte* the claims of the whole world stand out in opposition to the claim of spiritual destiny. There is up to this point a rising scale of tragic conflict, and it is obvious that on Corneille's theory of the drama the ground of tragic action has now been covered. The later plays give indeed some variety of aspect to the problem: this is the case with *Théodore*, *Nicomède*, *Pulchérie*, and even with *Tite et Bérénice*, *Œdipe*, and *Sophonisbe*, but the force of the great *crescendo* of the earlier plays is spent. From one point of view, however, Corneille's theory of action in the drama could have had no different result. The later plays, like the earlier ones, testify to the consistency of his theory.⁴ [The central play in which Corneille's method and

¹ 'Il le faisait dans l'effusion de son cœur, parce qu'il était intérieurement persuadé que Corneille valait beaucoup mieux que lui' (Louis Racine, *Mémoires sur la vie de Jean Racine*).

² *Le Cid*, act v.

³ *Horace*, act iv.

⁴ See Lemaître, *Corneille et la Poétique d'Aristote*, pp. 13, 42, 78.

spirit should be studied is emphatically that of *Polyeucte*, taken in connexion with the plays that lead up to it.

The fact that Corneille called this play a *Tragédie chrétienne* explains to us from the outset that admiration and wonder rather than pity and terror will be called out by the drama which deals with spiritual exaltation as its chief *motif*. But the *Examen* to the play, written in 1660, claims for the drama the interest of a double appeal, to the man of the world as well as to the spiritual enthusiast,¹ and it must be judged then from the point of view of the dramatist, not only from that of the Christian author.

We may perhaps claim for Corneille that his Christian inspiration had the same kind of effect on the French classical drama as the primitive Christian idea had upon Roman classical architecture. Roman architecture, at the time of the Christian era, was carefully balanced and engineered; the architect was a scientist rather than an artist, and the ornament affixed was unessential to the main scheme, and, however beautiful in itself, was disconnected with the idea of the building. Now the first efforts of the Christian spirit in architecture took the material and the models, which were Roman, and in the rudest early Byzantine buildings forced the stone to express the symbol and aspiration of the Christian faith.² It produced a new art of a primitive type, which was true and consistent, an art

¹ 'Le stile n'en est pas si fort ny si majestueux que celui de *Cinna* et de *Pompée*, mais il a quelque chose de plus touchant, et les tendresses de l'amour humain y font un si agréable meslange avec la fermeté du divin que sa représentation a satisfait tout ensemble les dévots et les gens du monde' (*Examen de Polyeucte*).

² See Mr. Lethaby's article in *The Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem*, ed. Weir Schultz. 'Its architectural elements are late Roman, modified by being adapted to a new purpose.' The capitals 'are a simplified rather than a debased form of Corinthian, and are cut with vigour and understanding. They were thought of as masonry rather than sculpture, and already the idea of the Byzantine "impost" capital is implicit in their form.'

which touched where the Roman classical models failed to do so ; thus it has endured.

✓ What Corneille attempted to do for the tragic drama was so to blend the Christian spirit with the classic form that the fusion should produce a result consistent with itself : new and strong and fruitful of effect. It will be important to see, in estimating his success in *Polyeucte*, whether the play holds together and is alive throughout, and also whether it can be said to have produced a new *genre* of drama.

A certain freedom of action was desired by the dramatist. Corneille explains in the *Examen*¹ that he feels his hand freer to dramatize history in the case of Legends of the Saints than he would have done in making a rendering of the Gospel narrative. But this is not on account of the sacred characters occurring in the Gospel story. He explains in the *Examen* that the height of perfection of the Christian character which he strives to exhibit in *Polyeucte*, is admissible in drama, although the theory of Aristotle's *Poetics* is that the character of a hero should not be wholly evil or good, lest the audience should be unable to feel pity or ~~terror~~ at the *dénouement*. On his ground, therefore, a Passion-play may be true drama ; and he instances the Passion-play of Grotius, Heinsius's *Slaughter of the Innocents*, and other cases.² The freedom of treatment claimed by the dramatist

¹ ' Nous ne devons qu'une croyance pieuse à la vie des saints, et nous avons le mesme droit sur ce que nous en tirons pour le porter sur le théâtre que sur ce que nous empruntons des autres histoires ; mais nous devons une foy chrétienne et indispensable à tout ce qui est dans la Bible, qui ne nous laisse aucune liberté d'y rien changer. J'estime toutefois qu'il ne nous est pas défendu d'y ajouter quelque chose pourvu qu'il ne détruise rien de ces vérités dictées par le Saint-Esprit ' (*Examen de Polyeucte*).

² ' J'en ay déjà parlé ailleurs, et, pour confirmer ce que j'en ay dit par quelques autorités, j'ajouteray ici que Minturnus, dans son traité *Du Poëte*, agite cette question, " Si la Passion de Jésus-Christ et les martyres des saints doivent estre exclus du théâtre, à cause qu'ils passent cette médiocre bonté," et résout en ma faveur. Le célèbre Heinsius qui non seulement

is one of the conditions which make it possible for Corneille to put himself and his own thought and that of his times into the play. If *Polyeucte* holds together as a dramatic entity, it is because beneath the third-century setting, and the seventeenth-century characterization, we have a picture of humanity that is always true, and one which points forward to a spiritual perfection that is the 'hope of the ages' for the race. Nowhere do we see the human trait of the idealization of character more clearly shown than in the work of Corneille, and the underlying problems of his drama are those which, though peculiarly present to seventeenth-century minds, are always in evidence when there is the sense of spiritual effort and release.

The historical characters in the original story are less closely knit together in a plot than in Corneille's version. Corneille tells us that he has given Félix the position of governor of Armenia, and brought in Sévère to that country as a former lover of Pauline, and a favourite of the Emperor Décie.¹ The action is precipitated, and history is strained in order to bring about the crisis in the time that was now considered to be according to rule,² and the question as to the unity of place was solved as in other of Corneille's plays by giving to the *antichambre dans le palais de Félix*

a traduit la *Poétique* de nostre philosophe, mais a fait un traité de la constitution de la tragédie selon sa pensée, nous en a donné une sur le martyre des innocens. L'illustre Grotius a mis sur la scène la Passion mesme de Jésus-Christ et l'histoire de Joseph, et le scavant Buchanan a fait la mesme chose de celle de Jephté et de la mort de S. Jean-Baptiste' (*Examen de Polyeucte*).

¹ 'Pour donner plus de dignité à l'action, j'ay fait Félix gouverneur d'Arménie, et ay pratiqué un sacrifice public afin de rendre l'occasion plus illustre, et donner un prétexte à Sévère de venir en cette province sans faire éclater son amour avant qu'il en eust l'aveu de Pauline' (Ibid.).

² 'Il est hors de doute que, si nous appliquons ce poëme à nos coutumes, le sacrifice se fait trop tost après la venue de Sévère, et cette précipitation sortira du vraysemblable par la nécessité d'obéir à la règle' (Ibid.).

a character of nullity, which need not conflict with the different emotions of the people who are to meet there in the course of the drama. The onlooker is to imagine that this ante-chamber communicates with the rooms of Félix and Pauline, and Pauline, who would naturally have received Sévère in her own suite of rooms, sees him in the ante-chamber, Corneille giving to her action some dramatic significance in her desire to do honour to Sévère on his arrival, and in her wish to break off the interview, should it become too difficult for her.¹

In the characterization of the personages of the drama it is to be noticed that both Polyeucte and Pauline feel the full force of emotion, and the tragic conflict is real, and ends in the domination of the natural by the spiritual man. Thus the great scene between Sévère and Pauline in the second act is imposing from the strength of Pauline's attitude. Reason, and the obedience due to her father, have overcome her passion for Sévère, but Sévère's reproaches to her as cold and inconstant bring out, first, her consciousness of an inner struggle (reason is the tyrant in her mind over rebellious and all but unconquerable feelings);² and secondly her sense that only by obeying what she takes

¹ 'L'autre scrupule regarde l'unité de lieu, qui est assez exacte, puisque tout s'y passe dans une salle ou antichambre commune aux appartements de Félix et de sa fille. Il semble que la bienséance y soit un peu forcée pour conserver cette unité au second acte, en ce que Pauline vient jusque dans cette antichambre pour trouver Sévère, dont elle devoit attendre la visite dans son cabinet. A quoi je répons qu'elle a eu deux raisons de venir au-devant de luy: l'une, pour faire plus d'honneur à un homme dont son père redoutoit l'indignation et qu'il luy avoit commandé d'adoucir en sa faveur; l'autre pour rompre plus aisément la conversation avec luy,' &c. (*Examen de Polyeucte*).

² Ma raison, il est vrai, dompte mes sentiments;
Mais, quelque autorité que sur elle elle a prise,
Elle n'y règne pas, elle tyrannise.
Et quoique le dehors soit sans émotion
Le dedans n'est que trouble et sédition.

Polyeucte, act ii, sc. 2.

to be her duty, she can be worthy of Sévère. Of the main action, then, it may be said that it is a fair and complete type of Corneille's dramatic work. The struggle in Polyeucte's mind is communicated to Pauline, to Félix, to Sévère, and reverberates in this way among the characters on the stage. The dramatic characterization is responsible for the variety of ways in which the struggle is felt. With both Polyeucte and Pauline, though Polyeucte is in advance, the issue is practically certain, but Félix's change of heart comes as a rebound after his meanness and cruelty. Sévère, naturally generous, represents the better Pagan ideal, but cannot at the beginning of the play be counted upon to act on the same high plane as the Christian Polyeucte. Pauline's action, self-controlled and rational to an ideal pitch, is made more natural by the expression of a strongly developed intuitive side to her character, and this makes it clear that the conquest over fear, irresolution, and emotion is no easy and mechanical thing to her. Her character shows a mental and spiritual force bridling a strong temperament, and the last scenes are lighted up by the brilliant enthusiasm that can be shown in such a nature.

The play moves, inspired by one main *motif*, quietly and logically from the beginning to the end : the only part in which the movement seems to be hurried is in the rapid arrangement for the sacrifice (this Corneille himself realized), and in the conversion of Félix. But this conversion was really prepared for in earlier scenes, and the sudden capitulation was no doubt treated as miraculous, but partly also as the result of a struggle between good and evil, which was sharper and shorter in the case of Félix than in that of the other characters. The drama is consistent with itself, and no one of the chief characters is outside the influence of the main action. The two lesser characters, Stratonice and Albin, the ' *confidants* ', have their dramatic use. Stratonice

expresses a reasoned judgement on the events so far as they affect Pauline, and gives her mistress an opportunity of relating her past history. Albin provides a view of Félix's conduct, which is at once a guide to public opinion and a criticism of Félix. The 'confidants' fulfil in this way some of the functions of a Shakespearean crowd, or of the lesser characters in an Elizabethan play, together with what has been retained by the seventeenth-century drama of the rôle of the Greek chorus—that, namely, of comment on the action.

The appeal of the play, as Corneille wished it to be, is primarily that of a Divine comedy or spiritual drama. It has a distinct relation to the *comedias divinas* of Calderón. But the human interest of the play is also prominent. From the point of view of pure drama, the nobility of the central characters and their influence on others is like the nobility of the characters in Corneille's other plays, it is a greatness of the Romantic order. A dramatist who draws a Christian martyr possessing the graces of chivalry, but subduing them to a nobler aim, is really obeying the law of all great poetic drama in giving his characters an ideal force beyond our commonplace experience, and thus claiming our interest for them. It is a form of the detachment from ordinary conditions, which is symbolized by the very structure of the stage, and enhanced in different ways at different epochs. The dramatist may give his characters the tragic mask, and raise them, like the Greek actor, to more than common height; or he may, as in the seventeenth century, choose great names and themes through which to express the force of familiar heroic action; or he may call in the glitter and mystery of chivalric legend, enhance it by poetic diction, and make it remote by its setting; he may follow Shakespeare's poetic mood, or throw over it the veil of Maeterlinck—in all these different ways dramatic detachment can be

expressed. In the case of Corneille and Racine, though both used the means of Greek story and great historical events for their frame, there was a distinction in their manner of insulating character for the purposes of art, and thus producing the sense of detachment. Corneille chose one method of romanticism; Racine another.¹ The *belle âme* of the Cornelian stage, *magnanime* and *généreuse*, and the appeal to *gloire*, are the signs of this in Corneille. The connexion with the men and women we know is made in the secondary or transitional characters, and in the comedies.

In this way we may perhaps trace the development of the new type of Christian drama associated with the name of Corneille. Such a drama could not be mainly realistic, for by the terms of the statement attention is called to the perfecting of the will and to the ideal possibilities of character. The characters are not *inhuman* but *superhuman*, we can trace in them both the natural and the spiritual man, the former under the domination of the latter. It will be seen how easily the heroic romantic drama could develop into the Christian tragic drama. The sole change is that of the prevailing *motif*. From the *Cid* to *Polyeucte* is only a step.

¹ Racine, in a drama that is far more Greek than Corneille's, is conscious of a God who moves the world and is behind all manifestations of beauty in nature and of goodness in man, but Corneille feels God to be *in* man, inspiring the personality with the Divine grace. This is at once in touch with mysticism, with the robust individualism of Descartes, and with the Church's faith in a personal God. In Racine, to the breaking down of individual strength and freedom there corresponds the loss of belief in a prevailing power of goodness, until the Hebrew plays recall the stronger and more hopeful position which had been abandoned by him at an earlier stage.

CHAPTER III

CORNEILLE AND THE SPANISH DRAMA

IN considering the relation of the drama of the seventeenth century in France to foreign sources, it is possible to distinguish the periods of Spanish and Italian influence, and also to notice what types of play in France were most affected by Spain or by Italy. It is generally said that Spain had little influence either on Racine, or on the earlier comedies of Corneille, but a study of the Spanish drama in its two great developments in the seventeenth century, viz. the *auto* and the *comedia*, shows that at any rate the French classical drama shares some of the outstanding qualities of the Spanish *comedia*. Thus Corneille was influenced by the idea of honour in the Spanish play, and also, in his tragedies, by a sense of the worthlessness of human life when considered in relation to the great issues of conduct which is also found in the *autos*. The early comedies have been considered to be exempt from this influence, because contemporary evidence exists of Corneille's attention having been expressly drawn to the subject of Spanish drama after these comedies were written:¹ but as the relations between Spain and France were close, and at Rouen, where Corneille lived during the early part of his life, there was a large Spanish colony, there is nothing to prove that Corneille had not some knowledge of Spanish literature before he wrote the *Cid*, and the emphasis laid on intrigue in the earlier plays is much on the lines of the *comedia*.² In fact the strength of Spanish influence was

¹ See Beauchamps, *Recherches sur les Théâtres de France*, ii. 157.

² See especially *Clitandre*.

greater during the earlier period of Corneille than later, when *Le Menteur* inaugurated direct study of life for the stage.¹ Up to that time the French dramatist had been accustomed to take as material a comedy or a romance, or a pastoral, or a mythical or historical relation, and to weave his play from this. Corneille's light early comedies were of this pattern, though they had promise in them of a characterization that was not artificial nor seen through the medium of romance. So Italy and Spain, as well as the ancient world, and the world of seventeenth-century writers of romance, were drawn upon by the stage both for poetry and ideas. As Lanson has pointed out, the writers of tragi-comedy drew considerably from Spain, where Lope de Vega's prolific work promised a treasure of romantic material.² Racine's plays, in so far as their chief element is a love-interest, have also a likeness in this one point to the Spanish *comedia*.

The Spanish dramatists had gathered the names and descriptions of their characters from the whole of the civilized and uncivilized world: the careless freedom of their geography and chronology showed that, like Shakespeare, they bent probability to serve their artistic intuition, while their heroes, rushing through adventures, possible and impossible, remained Spaniards and kept all their national characteristics. For Spain had preserved a popular

¹ Corneille used the plot of Ruiz de Alarcón's comedy, *Verdad Sospechosa*, but the setting and characterization of *Le Menteur* are French.

² See Gustave Lanson, *Corneille*: ' . . . C'était en effet le roman, non la vie, qui servait de modèle: les poètes de théâtre allaient de Cervantes à d'Urfé, de l'Amadis à l'Argenis, de Leucippe à Cléagenor. On démarquait les comédies des Italiens; on s'approprièrent leurs pastorales. Mais la tragi-comédie vivait surtout aux dépens des Espagnols; outre la veine si riche des *Nouvelles*, déjà exploitée par le bonhomme Hardy, depuis quelques années arrivaient chez nous, en livrets ou en recueils, les comédies du grand Lope de Vega et de ses successeurs: nos "jeunes", Rotrou en tête, se jetèrent sur cette proie; ce fut une belle curée. On renonça à inventer: les féconds Espagnols nous épargnaient cette peine.'

national drama, little affected by the Renaissance or by the classical models or influence of Seneca. Argensola, it is true, had written plays modelled on Seneca, but Lope de Vega went back to the national form, and threw his immense vigour into it.¹

The actual staging of the plays was not unlike that of the Elizabethans. The courtyard or *patio* of a house was used, and a rough stage put up at one end. Ladies looked on from the windows of the house, and there were some seats sheltered by an awning, but the mass of the spectators stood in the courtyard. A rough farce was generally added to the more serious play to give pleasure to the 'groundlings',² and even when the national theatre was fully developed the first act was followed by a farce, and the second and third by ballets. Molière imitated the Spanish practice by the introduction of ballets in *La Princesse d'Élide*, *L'Amour Médecin*, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, *Le Malade Imaginaire*, *Le Sicilien*, *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, *Les Amants Magnifiques*.

In the construction of the Spanish play we may find a characteristic common both to Spain and France in the seventeenth century. The plays run clearly and logically to a conclusion which is foreseen from the first. Whatever explanation may be found for this fact in France, it is

¹ It is also true that after Lope de Vega the free form of his drama was attacked by some Spanish writers in the name of the 'Ancients', but their attempts failed to diminish the great popularity of the drama of national Spanish origin (see G. Huszár, *P. Corneille et le Théâtre Espagnol*, pp. 99-103). They were practically answered by Tirso de Molina, who justified the imitation of life in the comedies of Lope de Vega, and urged that a drama which fulfils the conditions of reflecting reality is doing more for the development of the art than any imitations of classical models could do, and by Francesco de la Barrida (*ibid.*, pp. 105-7). No strong effect of classical art was apparent in Spain till the national decadence of the eighteenth century came about. Then imitations of French plays encouraged the classical idea in Spanish drama.

² *Mosqueteros*.

clear that no classical influence had helped to build up a theory of dramatic construction in Spain. Perhaps, however, it may be suggested that popular national drama seems as a rule to answer an expectation in the audience for a fixed result in the play: an elementary type of mind wishes to be prepared from the outset for the *dénouement*, leaving a margin for wonder and curiosity as to how that will be reached. In all countries popular melodrama even of the modern type has this kind of construction. It is a foregone conclusion that the plot shall work out to a certain end. Thrills of feeling and active interest may be aroused, but there is no real doubt as to the result. We find even in the drama of Lope de Vega, and in a greater degree in that of Calderón, that character-drawing is sometimes subordinated as a result of this unconscious concession to popular expectation in dramatic story. The Spanish play generally opened with a lengthy monologue, explaining a good deal of the action which in the Shakespearean drama would have been put upon the stage, and thus have created for the audience a continuous stimulus of interest. One peculiarity of these monologues in Calderón's plays is their lyrical character. They are poetical in treatment and break into refrain.¹ Corneille uses this method in *Médée* (Soliloquy of *Ægée*),² in *Le Cid* (Soliloquy of Don Rodrigue),³ in *Polyeucte*,⁴ and in *Héraclius*.⁵

The influence of the Spanish upon the French drama is not, however, limited to that of details of construction. In other ways the dramatic art of Spain has been significant to the history of the French plays of the seventeenth century.

Of the great ideas which dominated the Spanish literature from which the French dramatists of the sixteenth and

¹ See, in addition, Mira de Mesqua, *Examinarse de rey*, act i, sc. 10; Lope de Vega, *La Clave de la honra* (Soliloquy of Lisardo).

² Act iv, sc. 4. ³ Act i, sc. 6. ⁴ Act iv, sc. 3. ⁵ Act v, sc. 1.

seventeenth centuries took so much of their material and some of their inspiration, the religious and the monarchical idea were perhaps the most strongly characteristic of Spain as a whole. Religious feeling in that country had been quickened by the struggle against the Moors, and rendered more acute by the events of the Reformation.¹ Monarchical feeling was excited at the same time, and the kings held the position of great religious leaders, who identified themselves with every holy war.² Literature reflected these conditions, and the large number of *autos sacramentales* written by Calderón and others, and even more the religious character and force of the lay drama, witness to them. The moral direction given to Spanish drama by patriotic and religious feeling was further accentuated by a clear vision of the worthlessness of material present conditions as such, unless they were contributory to some moral end. Hence the importance in Spanish drama of the visitants from another world, and still more so of the vision of death. The very earliest known version of the *Dance of Death* is the Castilian one, though it can probably be referred to an earlier French original. The thought of death certainly pre-occupied many writers of the sixteenth century in Spain, and its influence is also witnessed to by the large amount of beautiful elegiac verse written then and earlier in the Golden Age of Spanish literature.³ But against this pensive and melancholy background of feeling, where life is likened to

¹ 'La caractéristique peut-être principale de la société espagnole des xvi^e et xvii^e siècles est le profond sentiment religieux que la lutte acharnée pendant plus de huit siècles contre les infidèles rendit plus vivace encore' (G. Huszár, *P. Corneille et le Théâtre Espagnol*, pp. 127, 128).

² *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30. 'C'est donc par l'intermédiaire de la religion, qui, en Espagne, était la base de l'idée nationale, que grandissait le prestige du pouvoir royal.'

³ e.g. the lament of Jorge Manrique on his father's death: *Coplas por la muerte de su padre*.

a dream, a tenuous drifting and dissolving mist, we must set the love of the bright grace of Spanish life, which runs like a dazzling thread through what would otherwise be the gloomy pattern of their thought,¹ and is perhaps more characteristic of Spanish art and literature as a whole than the mystical consideration of death which was so prominent in Calderón and some of his contemporaries. If, as they thought, the last breath of life is disillusion, still no one has felt more keenly than they did the fleeting beauties of sound, of colour, and of gesture: the fact that sound dies, colour fades, and living movement becomes rigid, implies an evanescent charm which has real pathos. Where melancholy and aesthetic sensibility of this description are both found, shallow self-deception and robust clinging to pleasure are absent. But we can trace great exaggeration in speech and in feeling. Probably this comes from the attempt to express in each work of art the whole impression of sensibility and melancholy, which led the Spanish writers of the seventeenth century to use so frequently as a symbol the concrete figure of Death. Thus we find a curious pomp—not seldom funereal in character—invading the Spaniard's life and art. His knowledge of the presence of death-in-life did not stop short at a mystical experience; his artistic instinct impelled him to give his convictions shape and form.² Philip II, living in the Escorial among black-vestured courtiers, was a type of his period.³ Victor Hugo's rendering of the Charles V legend in *Hernani* gives a tempting caricature of it.

¹ See e.g. many descriptive passages in Calderón's *autos sacramentales*.

² St. John of the Cross is affected by this national failure. In his attempt to express the ineffable in the forms of sense he destroys the delicacy of spiritual experience.

³ '... C'est là que Philippe II vivait, au milieu des tombeaux de l'Escorial, entouré de ses courtisans vêtus de noir.' Lucien-Paul Thomas, 'La genèse de la philosophie et le symbolisme dans *La vie est un songe* de Calderón.'

And the people delighted in a form of pageant-drama, the *autos sacramentales*, in which the figure of Death appeared to warn all, great and small, of his inevitable approach.

Such ideas are not alien to the French temperament, and the magnificence, the melancholy, together with the charm of Spanish art appealed to France, where also sentiment tends to be expressed in the form of a pageant, and the art of the cemetery takes immense proportions, but where, too, a sense of the proper gesture and rhythm beautifies all common actions and words, and an impersonal delight in what is lovely, and a joy in the passing moment can be grafted on to indifference and pessimism. In the seventeenth century, when political bonds between France and Spain were close,¹ the societies of the two nations mixed and influenced one another; and the French dramatist was drawn to seek subjects for imitation or development in the wide field of Spanish literature.

Calderón's drama is typical of the qualities of Spanish art just described. His play *La vida es sueño* (*Life's a Dream*) may be taken as an example. The hero Sigismond is perhaps another 'Everyman'. Uncertainly placed between two states of consciousness, one of which he takes to be a dream, his thoughts are turned back upon the problem of existence and deal with it in philosophic terms. The drama of Calderón is thus on the same line as Corneille's in its avoidance of the pagan notion of fatality. Destiny is both human and

¹ 'During the reign of Louis XIII and in the early years of Louis XIV the Spanish influence was dominant at the court. The wives of both kings were Spanish, and the relation between the two kingdoms was very close. Companies of Spanish comedians were made welcome in Paris, and one of them was allowed to share the stage of the Hôtel de Bourgogne shortly after Molière's return to Paris, just as his company shared the Petit-Bourbon with the Italian comedians. Spanish customs were in fashion in court circles, and so were the Spanish language and Spanish literature' (Brander Matthews, *Molière, His Life and Works*, p. 51).

divine ; Sigismond's circumstances do but awake his slumbering will ; the vision of the unseen world around and within him gradually overcomes the temptations of animal instinct and unveils to him the deeper reality of spirit. Thus compared with this reality material things have only a slender, short-lived and shadowy existence : life is a dream.¹ Thus apart from direct imitation of Spanish originals, there are signs in Corneille of the exaltation of the same passions of loyalty, patriotism, and religious zeal which mark the drama of Calderón. The two poets were contemporaries. Calderón was born in 1600 and died in 1681, Corneille was born in 1606 and died three years after Calderón. As far as is known he neither adapted Calderón's plays nor alluded directly to his knowledge of that author. But that he was not untouched by the same spirit can be gathered from the likeness between his Christian drama of *Polyeucte* and some aspects of Calderón's *The Constant Prince*, while passages in *La vida es sueño* (*Life's a Dream*) of the Spanish author are, as we have seen, intimately descriptive of the vision of the unseen world which controls the action of Corneille's tragedies. This latter play (acted in 1635) preceded *Polyeucte* by seven years.²

¹ See *La vida es sueño*, act ii.

What is life ? a frenzy mere ;
 What is life ? e'en that we deem ;
 A conceit, a shadow all,
 And the greatest good is small
 Nothing is, but all things seem,
 Dreams within dreams
 Still we dream.

The dramatic instinct of Calderón frequently leads him to increase the sense of reality on the stage by insisting on the unreal and evanescent quality of ordinary life. As the characters on the stage utter these thoughts they approach more nearly to the personal experience of the audience, and at the same time acquire for themselves more value and relief in the picture.

² Other likenesses to be noted are the treatment of the problem of

Calderón's *The Constant Prince* is Don Fernando, youngest son of John I of Portugal. Like Polyeucte, he is a chivalrous gentleman as well as a warrior and a saint, and the three aspects of his character come out consecutively, the first especially in the scene with the other captives in the royal garden. In the remaining acts the transition is made from the warrior to the martyr who welcomes pain and delights in enduring it. Calderón completes his play by bringing the spirit of the martyred Prince to lead the Christian army to victory over the Moor : the great host in the glow of triumph is presented in one of the scenes in his play. Corneille, on the other hand, makes us feel the moral victory only through the exaltation in Polyeucte's own mind. Both the play of *Polyeucte* and *The Constant Prince* are dominated from the very first scene by a note of sadness : there is a heavy presage brooding over the action. Calderón has attempted to relieve it by giving his captives a hope of deliverance ; Corneille has done so, too, in the efforts of Pauline to save Polyeucte. But the deepening tragic cloud is the same in both plays.

The symbolic drama, *Life's a Dream*, is not like any dramatic work of Corneille's. But it shows us that the pre-occupation of the Spanish poet was the same as that of the French author : the question of the freedom and integrity of the human will. Calderón wrote two dramas with the same title, one an *auto* or devotional act, not meant for the stage, and this *comedia*.¹ The former shows by symbolic action what the latter shows in human drama, namely, that man is conceived of as naturally rebellious before God ; even if preserved from temptation he is

Christianity and paganism by Calderón in *Los dos amantes del cielo* and *El José de las mujeres*.

¹ Anything meant for presentation on a stage was called in Spain a *comedia*, whether tragic or comic.

haunted by the shadow of sin. Understanding and will attend him, but the moral struggle has to take place in each man's soul. The words uttered by Man as the central figure in Calderón's *auto* might be a motto for the whole tragic drama of Corneille.

¿ Quién me dirá si Teatro
Que á la vista representa
Viva muerte, y muerta vida,
Es victoria, o es tragedia ? ¹

Other characteristics of the Spanish drama which are connected with the great general lines of its thought are the insistence on the dignity and value of the individual, on high courage and adventurous spirit, and also on the sanctity of the social and religious bond. Thus even the bandits have their strict laws of honour, and the submission of the individual to authority which he recognizes as supreme has a heroic quality in it. Patriotism, loyalty to the King, religious faith, claim the life and enthusiasm of the Spanish hero. These qualities are often accompanied by a desire for a romantic detachment from everyday experience, and as a quick and easily inflamed sense of honour.² Molière has

¹ Who shall tell me if the Dramatic Muse
Which brings before the eye
Life in Death and Death in Life
Is Victory or Tragedy ? Sc. 24.

² See, for example, Calderón's *El Alcalde de Zalamea*, 1651 (the same theme was treated by Lope de Vega). The garotting of the captain for dishonouring the Mayor's daughter is condoned and even approved by Philip II. In *El Pintor de su Deshonra* (perhaps after 1648), the father condones the murder of a son who has taken Serafina from her husband. (In this play we find a tirade against the laws of the duel.) In another play translated by D. F. McCarthy, under the title 'Love after Death', Clara puts the sense of honour above truth and above her love.

Clara. Esteem, Alvaro, makes me refuse thee.

Alvaro. You have no power now to excuse thee (*sic*).

Clara. I at the least have power to die.

Alvaro. I shall tell Don Juan that I won your love.

Clara. And I shall deny it.

read them farcically in *Don Juan*,¹ Corneille has given us a more sympathetic rendering of them in *Don Sanche d'Aragon*, and treated them on the heroic scale in *Le Cid* and with satire in *Le Menteur*.

Corneille's adaptation of Guillem de Castro's *Cid* proves a close knowledge of the Spanish language. Sometimes he compresses a scene into a single phrase,² sometimes again he gives a paraphrase, or again a literal and adequate rendering of the original. In *Le Menteur* he uses with a very free hand a comedy of Alarcon ;³ in *La Suite du Menteur*, one of Lope de Vega's.⁴ *Don Sanche d'Aragon* was imitated partly from a Spanish comedy and partly from a romance.⁵

We have said that among the qualities of Calderón's drama shared by Corneille are the ideas of loyalty to the State, of personal feeling to the monarch, and that of the dignity of individual honour. In *El Alcalde de Zalamea* Philip II comes in as the just ruler who looks into the wrongs of his people. In *Luis Perez the Galician* and in other plays

Alvaro. Is this loyalty ?

Clara. Honour lives by it.

Alvaro. Is it truth ? 'Tis fidelity.

Clara. Since by yonder heavens so pure
I solemnly swear never to be
The wife of a man until I see
My honour once again secure.

¹ Molière's debt to Tirso de Molina's *Burlador de Sevilla y Convidado de Piedra* and his use of the Don Juan legend is considered separately, pp. 110, 111.

² 'Don Diègue aura ma Cour et sa foi pour prison.' *Le Cid*, act ii, sc. 8.

³ 'Cette pièce est en partie traduite, en partie imitée de l'espagnol . . . On l'a attribuée au fameux Lope de Vègue, mais il m'est tombé depuis peu entre les mains un volume de Don Juan d'Alarcon où il prétend que cette comédie est à lui, et se plaint des imprimeurs qui l'ont fait courir sous le nom d'un autre' (*Examen du Menteur*).

⁴ 'L'original espagnol est de Lope de Vègue sans contredit' (*Examen de la Suite du Menteur*).

⁵ The play was one called *El Palacio confuso*. It is doubtful whether this play is one of Lope de Vega's or should be attributed to Mira de Mescua. See Corneille, in *Les Grands Écrivains de la France*, vol. v, p. 414, note, and the *Examen de Don Sanche d'Aragon*.

we have the same conception of kingship. Corneille too, in *Le Cid* and *Horace*, for example, shows the king as lawgiver and just judge, evoking the reverence of the people.¹

Over one thing only the king in the Spanish drama is not absolute, and that is the honour of his subjects. Calderón's women give expression to this in words : they are all high-minded and consider their honour as more precious than life. Material is given for tragic conflict by the struggle between the desire to keep the sanctity of the hearth and individual honour intact as against the pressure of other obligations. The same lofty tone governs the conduct of Corneille's heroines, of Rodelinde and Théodore as well as of the greater figures of his drama.²

In the Spanish drama, where jealousy is a frequent motive of action, the slightest breath of scandal is conceived of as sullyng a woman's fame as thoroughly as the actual evidence of sin.³ This has its parallel in *Othello*⁴ and in other dramas

¹ Pour vaincre un point d'honneur qui combat contre toi,
Laisse faire le temps, ta vaillance et ton Roi.
Le Cid, act v, sc. 7.

Vis donc, Horace, vis, guerrier trop magnanime,
Ta vertu met ta gloire au-dessus de ton crime.
Horace, act v, sc. 3.

² e.g. J'ai soustrait Théodore à la rage insensée
Sans blesser sa pudeur de la moindre pensée.
Elle fuit, et sans tache, où l'inspire son Dieu.
Ne m'en demandez point ni l'ordre ni le lieu.
Comme je n'en prétends ni faveur ni salaire,
J'ai voulu l'ignorer, afin de le mieux taire.
Speech of Didyme, *Théodore*, act iv, sc. 5.

And see the speech of Rodelinde, *Pertharite*, act v, sc. 3.

³ Cf. Sganarelle in *L'École des Maris* : ' Il ne faut pas que même elle soit soupçonnée ' (act iii, sc. 2). See the passage quoted in G. Huszár, *P. Corneille et le Théâtre Espagnol*, p. 151 : ' L'honneur est d'une matière tellement fragile qu'un acte peut le briser, un souffle l'entacher.' See too the passage in Calderón's *El Astrólogo fingido* :

Y un hombre, con solo hablar,
(Tan fácil es la deshonra !)
Es bastante á quitar la honra.

⁴ Act iii, sc. 3, 4.

of vengeance. The custom which made immediate revenge incumbent on any one whose honour had suffered the slightest attack or suspicion, either in his person or in that of his wife or family, ran through the whole scale of Spanish society from the princely house to that of the peasant.¹ Although the custom of duelling which was connected with this is sometimes ironically alluded to,² the whole question

¹ See Calderón's *El Pintor de su Deshonra*, *El Alcalde de Zalamea*, and many others. Spanish society in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had so many grades of nobility that the larger portion of the nation was noble and formed what has been called 'une égalité aristo-démocratique'. This no doubt helped to account for the fact mentioned above. The very large part assigned to honour in the intrigue of the Spanish play might almost be said to result in the 'laws of honour' affecting the development of the plot as 'destiny' did in a Greek play. There was usually no escape from the consequences (Corneille took what his countrymen considered to be a sentimental view in his version of the story of the *Cid*), and every kind of cruelty when done in the name of honour was condoned and approved. See G. Huszár, *P. Corneille et le Théâtre Espagnol*, p. 149.

² As by Don Juan in *El Pintor de su Deshonra*, by the young Emperor Charles V in *El postrer Duelo de España*, and in *Love after Death*, where the following conversation shows a curious compromise which was a consequence of the application of the laws of honour :

Valor. If satisfaction for his wrong
He still requires, it doth belong
But to a son-in-law ; this marriage
Twixt Doña Clara and Don Juan
Makes all secure.

Alvaro (*aside*). Ah ! woe is me !—

Valor (to Malec). No other way that I can see
Can you repair your honour's ruin.
For then your insult being extended
To him, you must become the defender—
As a third party, he is the offender,
But as your son-in-law the offended :—
There being no party then to claim
Satisfaction from, and no ill to cure,
With you the effect becomes secure,
And with Don Juan Mendoza the same :—
For he not having then to give
Death to himself, in this immense
Abyss, must hold his own offence
In his own breast, and so forgive ;
So that the offence itself being gone,—

appears to have been taken more seriously in Spain than in France, where Molière's satire in *Georges Dandin* is sufficient to show that the 'laws of honour' belonged to a privileged class, and that they were so artificial that the mere denial of an act, true or not, was considered as satisfaction. Molière contrasts here the aristocrat and his artificial conventions with the genuine distress of the bourgeois class at any attack on the integrity of family life.

In the Spanish 'cloak-and-sword' comedies, the intrigue is constantly involved in these rapid broils, desperate situations, and the appeal to the sword. An 'affair of honour' between two men, in which one of them was slain, frequently occurred and seemed to be no bar to the happy marriage of the victor to the sister of the slain man, provided the fight was fair: though any one who had fallen upon his enemy without due warning, or laid an ambush for him, could not expect to have his misdeed forgiven in the same way. Corneille's drama shows us that this view prevailed in France also. In the last acts of *Le Cid* and *Horace* the King absolves Rodrigue and Horace from the idea of unfair and premeditated crime.¹

Not only, then, in the great lines and significance of the drama, but also in the problems set and in the solution of them, Calderón's drama and that of Corneille show striking analogies, due in part to the spirit of the time, and in part to likenesses in the national temperament which both writers faithfully reflected in their plays. The 'romanticism' of Corneille is connected with Spanish influence, while his regularly constructed plays, subject to classical form, still

No man being self-angry long—
 Don Juan wisely guarding his wrong—
 No one remains to take vengeance on:—
 This the honour of both will render
 Pure as before, since human eyes
 Never saw one person comprise
 Both the offended and the offender.

¹ *Le Cid*, act v, sc. 6; *Horace*, act v, sc. 3.

share with the Spanish drama the elevated national and religious feeling which both writers expressed for their age and for their own countries. But in Corneille's adaptation of Spanish plays the underlying differences of national character are also exhibited. For instance, while the love of glory is common to both countries the Spanish hero seeks glory through the satisfaction of a sense of honour rooted in *amour propre*. Hence the tragic conflict is often between honour and love, or between personal honour and devotion to the King, or between love and loyalty to an idea. The hero of Corneille seeks glory too, but the glory he desires is a spiritual reward. Obedience to a moral law takes in the French drama the place of an excessive attention to the position of the self in public opinion. Thus Corneille's heroes are more independent and less self-regarding than those of contemporary Spanish drama. They can afford to discuss points of honour more rationally and are less liable to affront. The tragic conflict in his plays is between duty on the one hand, and the passion of love or of ambition on the other. Through making a different motive the pivot of the action, Corneille has softened and altered the outlines of the Spanish plays which he has used or imitated. Where, as in the case of the insult offered to Don Diègue in *Le Cid*, he kept in his version a fact which was characteristically Spanish, this was immediately commented on adversely by a French audience.

Other distinctions that may be drawn between the two types of drama lie in the position of women, which was socially and politically stronger in France than in Spain, and is reflected in the drama, and in the relation of subjects to the King, which in Spain was a less servile and more equal relation than in France under Louis XIV.¹

¹ For a further discussion of the differences between French and Spanish drama see the *Revue Bleue*, January 1908.

The Spanish influence on the drama of Corneille was in fact a greatly modified one. Corneille might use ancient form or foreign plots, but his characters were studied from life. His claim to be the father of French drama should rest not on his use of romantic elements, though he knew how to deal with the material offered by Spain, nor on his use of classical form, though he knew how to read below the surface of Aristotle's words, but on his power of giving to his audience at that period a play which aroused their judgement and also appealed to their aesthetic sense, and which was convincing because in the tragedies it was a picture of the national powers and capacities, and in the comedies a criticism of the actual contemporary social standard.

CHAPTER IV

CORNEILLE AND THE THEORY OF THE DRAMA

CORNEILLE, in his three *Discours* (*De la Tragédie, Des Trois Unités, Du Poème dramatique*) fully illustrated by his plays, has left on record the stages of his constructive theory of the tragic drama, and of dramatic form and treatment. His theories are further explained in the *Examens* to the plays, written in 1660.

It is evident when we study his *Discours* that Corneille knew the *Poetics* of Aristotle, at any rate in a Latin version, but that he differed in many points from what he thought was Aristotle's meaning, though he was anxious to show exactly how far his own theory of the drama coincided with that of the Greek philosopher. But like every experienced playwright Corneille based his theory chiefly on his own dramatic experience, and in an age when the 'rules of art' were treated as if they were laws of nature he shows remarkable independence and insight in his application of his knowledge of stage conditions to a theory of the art.

He accepts in general the definition of a tragedy as arousing pity and terror. He thinks they usually co-operate in true tragedy, but that sometimes terror only may be produced. In this view, as has been pointed out in Butcher's *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*,¹ Corneille believes himself to have the support of Aristotle.² He thus makes use of every type of impression, sometimes producing terror

¹ Page 259.

² 'Il suffit selon lui, de l'un des deux pour faire cette purgation, avec cette différence toute fois, que la pitié n'y peut arriver sans la crainte, et que la crainte peut y parvenir sans la pitié' (*Discours de la Tragédie*).

alone as a consequence. It follows that Corneille does not accept Aristotle's two conditions of tragedy, viz. (1) that the virtuous person must not suffer unjustly lest the pity of the audience should be overwhelmed by their wrath, and (2) that the wicked must not be prosperous, for that would excite neither pity nor terror, only wrath.¹ Neither does Corneille accept the idea that a successful tragedy must lie between these two extremes.² To his mind Aristotle's examples carry no weight, for Oedipus falls into crime by accident,³ and Thyestes is guilty, and deserves punishment.

'Aristote en donne pour exemple Œdipe et Thyeste, en quoi véritablement je ne comprends pas sa pensée. Le premier me semble ne faire aucune faute, bien qu'il tue son père, parce qu'il ne le connoit pas, et qu'il ne fait que disputer le chemin en homme de cœur contre un inconnu qui l'attaque avec avantage. Néanmoins, comme la signification du mot grec ἀμαρτία peut s'étendre à une simple erreur de méconnaissance, telle qu'étoit la sienne, admettons-le avec ce philosophe, bien que je ne puisse voir quelle passion il nous donne à purger, ni de quoi nous pouvons nous corriger sur son exemple. Mais pour Thyeste, je n'y puis découvrir cette probité commune, ni cette faute sans crime qui le plonge dans son malheur . . .'⁴

Now in conveying a dramatic impression to his audience, Corneille had to deal with an entirely different set of conditions from those implied in the Aristotelian theory. For

¹ *Poetics*, xiii. 2. See also the discussion on the 'sinless crime' of Antigone, Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, pp. 303-4, and Corneille, *Discours de la Tragédie*: 'L'exclusion des personnes tout à fait vertueuses qui tombent dans le malheur, bannit les martyrs de votre théâtre. Polyeucte y a réussi contre cette maxime, et Héraclius et Nicomède y ont plu, bien qu'ils n'impriment que de la pitié et ne nous donnent rien à craindre ni aucune passion à purger.'

² *Poetics*, xiii. 4 (Butcher).

³ See Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, p. 314. 'If Oedipus is the person who suggested to Aristotle the formula of this chapter, we can hardly limit the word to its moral meaning, as marking either a defect of character or a single passionate or inconsiderate act.'

⁴ *Discours de la Tragédie*, pp. 56-7.

example, the ethical appeal made by the Greek drama had a character that was quite distinct from that of the modern drama. In one sense the early Greek drama was not ethical. Action on the Greek stage did not grow out of character. This was of course partly because well-known episodes of myth and history were chosen for representation. But the Greek dramatist presented an ethical idea quite clearly to the audience for personal application. Each onlooker might have committed a 'sinless crime', or have broken consciously a moral law. In either case he was made aware of the necessary retribution, which was as relentless as fate, and from which difference of motive or intention afforded no shelter whatever. In the dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles there are two ways in which this appeal was treated as universal. (1) The feeling evoked by the play was hardly concerned with a special incident, rather with the whole march of human destiny.¹ (2) And, again, so much were the actors only the human (and sometimes indeed scarcely human) symbols of their crimes and acts, that the Greek onlooker, set free from considerations of personal sympathy which are called out on the modern stage, might constantly apply the whole story to himself. It was of the essence of the Greek drama that it represented forces that were incarnate in every person, or might become so.²

All this is based upon certain facts in Greek thought which mark off the ancient from the modern world. The Greeks were not convinced of the uniformity of nature.

¹ Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, pp. 258, 261, 263.

² A stimulus was thus given which impelled each man in the audience to redress his moral balance. The dramatic artist had placed the individual problem in relation to great general ideas. The onlooker faced in himself the facts thus presented to him, and transferred the scene of the conflict back again to that of the individual life. See Prof. Margoliouth, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, pp. 57, 154; Aristotle, *Poetics*, vi. 9-10; and P. H. Frye, *Corneille, the Neo-classic Tragedy and the Greek*.

Science and history brought to them terrible shocks and doubts. In the face of the mystery of the external world, the only certain knowledge of which was that of its power to punish relentlessly the man who forced its secrets, the one security to the Greeks lay in the courage and integrity of the human will. [What they dreaded with a supreme terror was the possibility of moral disorder.] This is perhaps involved in the teaching of the Prometheus story.¹ They were oppressed on the one hand by the iron cruelty of physical destruction and death, on the other by the fear of moral dissolution.

It is not difficult to see how strong was the appeal of Greek drama to France at the time of Corneille, when the question of the freedom and supremacy of the human will was the great question for the dramatic artist as well as for theologians and philosophers, when, too, some fuller knowledge of the forces of nature was daily calling upon men's comprehension of the relation between the visible and invisible worlds. It is easy, too, to see that the problems set in the ancient drama of Greece demanded a new answer. And this answer Corneille was prepared to give. [To his mind the balance of the ancient tragic conflict had been altered by the introduction of the Christian idea into life.] But he does not make the mistake of attempting to place problems on the stage which can only be resolved by the idea of a future life in which earthly wrongs may be put right and earthly omissions rectified. Thus he avoids the danger of want of dramatic significance, which marks at least one Shakespearean tragedy, *King Lear*, and which is

¹ 'The offence of Prometheus against Zeus, though unselfish and generous, must be expiated by suffering; the rebellious demi-god must be brought at last to merge his will in that of Zeus, to bind his brows with the willow of submission, and to place upon his finger the iron ring of necessity' (J. A. Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, p. 10).

accounted for by some critics on the ground that the appeal in *Lear* is from art to life and wider principles—or in fact to a higher court, giving it up as drama, and changing the ground of argument.¹ [But Corneille observes that the existence of a world in which spirit is reality, and the knowledge of that world on the part of characters in the drama, must strangely modify the idea of conflict, and at the same time enlarge it.] He shows, for instance, the quick recoil from the claims of ambition, pride, selfishness to the Christian theory of sacrifice for the good of others : this is illustrated in the *Cid* and *Horace*, and accounts for the unexpected conclusion of *Nicomède*. [The scale of feeling in Cornelian tragedy is set in a different key from that of the pagan world, and the whole *morale* of his plays depends on the existence of righteousness as a moral ideal, and on that of a world of spirit by whose laws men may be governed even in the strange conditions in which evil bears a part, that is, in this present world.] Thus on this plane of spiritual significance Death is swallowed up in victory, and the martyr in *Polyeucte* is the royal conqueror. [A new element, that of spiritual reward or failure, has entered into the problem of tragic conflict.] An examination of *Nicomède* and of *Héraclius* yield the same result as that of *Polyeucte*. So again in *Le Cid*, love causes the tragedy, but duty is seen in conflict with love.² Complex as well as simple

¹ Compare Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 327, where the writer shows the existence of this dramatic flaw, explains it, and adds: 'Pursued further and allowed to dominate, it would destroy the tragedy; for it is necessary to tragedy that we should feel that suffering and death do matter greatly, and that happiness and life are not to be renounced as worthless. Pursued further, again, it leads to the idea that the world, in that obvious appearance of it which tragedy cannot dissolve without dissolving itself, is illusive.'

² It is perhaps necessary to point out that this duty is a moral fact in the play, even if the particular obligation is to an ideal of pride out of which the world has grown.

impressions emerge, and Corneille's aim is to show that the formula of Aristotle when applied to spiritual conditions on earth gives a new opportunity and a larger one to the stage. Thus the *κάθαρσις* that results is no mere safety-valve or discharge of aesthetic emotion, but a moral regeneration.¹

[The effect on the mind of the onlooker, according to Corneille, depends on the power he has of recognizing in himself evil tendencies which are seen worked out to their tragic end on the stage, and on the imagination he may bring to bear in distinguishing the present prosperity of the wicked from the ultimate reward of the good.]²

There are further consequences to the drama of the method of Corneille. For instance, he conceives of human weakness as an agent of evil: a villain or persecutor, as in *Polyeucte*, *Nicomède*, *Théodore*, is not necessarily the villain of romance, but may be a man who has fallen short of the best.³ Again the wrong may be blindly done, and yet the act have evil consequences. Sometimes too, in the Cornelian drama, a moral change takes place, and a tragedy is averted. In the Aristotelian sense, as Corneille himself perceives,

¹ An element which some modern thinkers read into Aristotle's theory of the *κάθαρσις* has escaped Corneille. The purification which results from the exercise of the creative power on the passions of the individual artist is not dealt with by the French dramatist. He thinks Aristotle explains the stimulating effect of pity and terror, but not the purification of the passions. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, vi. 2, and Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, pp. 239 et seq., and the comparison with Keble's *Theory of Poetry*, note, pp. 247, 248. Compare Prof. Margoliouth, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, p. 127, for an explanation of the *κάθαρσις* drawn from a consideration of Aristotle's other writings. This explanation is one that would have appealed to Corneille; see e.g. his *Examen of Rodogune*.

² Corneille excuses the poisoning episode in *Rodogune* by claiming that it may affect those in his audience who have given way to thoughts which have not found their way out into act. He suggests, too, in the *Examen de Nicomède*, that where love of virtue is inculcated hatred of vice is induced, and thus the passions of the audience are purged.

³ Cf. *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*.

Le Cid, *Cinna*, *Héraclius*, and *Nicomède* are not true tragedies.

But in the Cornelian sense the idea of the most sublime tragedy may include cases in which the final act is averted, for the spiritual conflict may be complete:¹ the highest purpose of man may have been frustrated, though the action of the play may stop short of evident crime.² And, again, the supreme conquest may have been achieved within the limits of conventional tragedy. This is the characteristic of *Polyeucte*.

Sometimes in Corneille's drama a person in close human relationship to another, such as that of child or father, bound by every tie of moral obligation, may be treated as an enemy, or indifferent. This is a type of tragedy which is not Greek, though it is Shakespearean, and forms the setting for *Lear*. [It is the tragedy of egoism, of unnatural self-seeking, of anti-social forces.] A forcible illustration is to be found in *Rodogune*.

The moral conceptions which we have described have modified in an interesting way Corneille's treatment of history in the historic drama. His technical art teaches him to substitute narration for some incidents, or *vice versa*, incident for the recitation of the Greek chorus; and his strong individuality has seized upon the idea that each author must present the results of his own intuition of history, even if the facts are the same for all, but in order to express himself and his ideal Corneille also assumes the right to add episodes and characters, and to call in vengeance from above in place of the narrower human retaliation.³ Thus he marks the contrast between the retribution in

¹ *Discours de la Tragédie*, pp. 68-9.

² See the last act of *Cinna*. See also the last scene of *Théodore*, where Placide's vengeance on his father Valens is prevented, but Placide recognizes that Valens will suffer in his son's suffering (act v, sc. 9).

³ He does not, however, admit the use of supernatural machinery on the stage, and is quite clear against such devices as were afterwards used by Goethe in *Faust*.

Sophocles' *Electra* and that of *Rodogune*.¹ Vengeance, if it is to have the effect Corneille desired, must not carry with it the sting of the Mosaic precept, 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,' but should recall the '“ Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” saith the Lord'. As the frame that Corneille imposes on his art is that of the unseen world, the shrinking of individual man before the thought of human destiny yields in the Christian drama of Corneille to wonder and awe before the ways of God to man.² ✓

¹ 'Il étoit de son devoir de venger cette mort ; mais il étoit de celui des princes de ne se pas charger de cette vengeance. Elle avoue elle-même à Antiochus qu'elle les haïroit, s'ils lui avoient obéi ; que comme elle a fait ce qu'elle a dû par cette demande, ils font ce qu'ils doivent par leur refus ; qu'elle aime trop la vertu pour vouloir être le prix d'un crime ; et que la justice qu'elle demande de la mort de leur père seroit un parricide, si elle la recevoit de leurs mains' (Corneille, *Examen de Rodogune*, p. 426). See *Rodogune*, act v, sc. 4, where Cléopâtre, suspected by Rodogune of attempting to poison Antiochus, drinks herself of the poisoned cup ; and Corneille's account of the play in the *Discours de la Tragédie*, p. 79 : 'Après que Cléopâtre eut tué Séleucus, elle présenta du poison à son autre fils Antiochus, à son retour de la chasse ; et ce prince, soupçonnant ce qu'il en étoit, la contraignit de le prendre, et la força à s'empoisonner. Si j'eusse fait voir cette action sans y rien changer, c'eût été punir un parricide par un autre parricide ; on eût pris aversion pour Antiochus, et il a été bien plus doux de faire qu'elle-même, voyant que sa haine et sa noire perfidie alloient être découvertes, s'empoisonne dans son désespoir, à dessein d'envelopper ces deux amants dans sa perte, en leur ôtant tout sujet de défiance. Cela fait deux effets. La punition de cette impitoyable mère laisse un plus fort exemple, puisqu'elle devient un effet de la justice du ciel, et non pas de la vengeance des hommes ; d'autre côté, Antiochus ne perd rien de la compassion et de l'amitié qu'on avoit pour lui, qui redoublent plutôt qu'elles ne diminuent, et enfin l'action historique s'y trouve conservée malgré ce changement puisque Cléopâtre périt par le même poison qu'elle présente à Antiochus.'

² When Greek art declined and Greek philosophy was at its height, the latter assumed the necessity for a synthesis of the seen and unseen worlds. In France of the seventeenth century, when philosophy had given up this attempt and was starting afresh from the standpoint of the individual experience (Descartes), it was the Cornelian drama that redressed the balance and claimed the whole moral and spiritual sphere for poetic art. (Cf. Milton in England in the same period.)

Perhaps one of the most general characteristics of the Cornelian drama is the inner necessity which it expresses. As the French dramatist in thinking out his plot has already given a certain direction to his characters, the *dénouement* often appears inevitable from the first. For in the French sense the idea of a play is hardly ripe for expression until the result is practically determined. All this produces the impression of a break for reflection having occurred in the author's mind between the inception and the formulation of the idea. It would, however, be more correct to say that the inevitableness is due, not to an iron form in the drama or to the exclusion of such relevant though preparatory matter as we have in Shakespeare, but to psychological causes, and thus in its origin, to the consistent character of thought. In France, though there are two distinct types of tragic drama, [the tragedy of blood of the sixteenth century, and the tragedy of the seventeenth century, in which the play works up to a crisis at the end (the transition and break between the two types being effected by Hardy's tragi-comedies), in each case the central fact is inevitable and determined from the outset. In most cases the plot was a familiar historical one, that left no doubt in the mind of the spectator, but the central action governed the development in the author's mind of every kind of play. The tragedy of blood detailed this central action with all its consequences.¹ The tragic drama of the seventeenth century developed the action from the heavy cloud of the presage of evil to the great crisis at the end, and detailed no consequences. The construction of the tragedy is consistent in both types, the difference lying in the position of the crisis.²

¹ In France, as Lanson points out (*Corneille*, p. 43), public taste revolted against physical horrors, and the moral and mental consequences of crime became more strongly insisted upon.

² It is easy to see that the old arrangement of the stage was applicable

Now though the inevitableness of the action might appear at first sight to be a limitation, it has the character of self-determination, and this is a sign of strength.† The force of the French drama can be seen to depend greatly upon it. The Cornelian drama rings out a high note of consistent effort, freedom, and progress. To the heroes of Corneille belong the 'undivided soul', which is Aeschylean, though not Shakespearean.¹ Such heroism of the will is naturally not always rewarded, but it declares the utmost strength of humanity, which is brought fully into play, even if it is to be overwhelmed by a final catastrophe.² The tragic event in Corneille lies in the defeat and destruction of the best by the concurrence of outer forces, but there is an appeal to time and to the spiritual sense of man to decide who is the true conqueror.³

The contrast here is very strong both with the Elizabethan drama and the French romantic drama of the nineteenth century. One or two instances may recall this. In the former, where Lear is 'stretched upon the rack of this tough world', and Hamlet does not know

Why yet I live to say 'this thing's to do',⁴

it is because neither has drunk his cup to the uttermost when he becomes self-paralysed by his own shortcomings in judgement and action.

to the sixteenth-century drama, and that the unity of place, time, and event created a suitable frame for the seventeenth-century tragedy. It is interesting to notice that Corneille does not put his crisis by any means always in the last act, though he does in *Rodogune*, and that the position of the crisis in Racine's plays seems to depend on his conception of the force of good or evil as the prevailing unseen power. Cf. *Esther* and *Athalie* with his earlier plays.

¹ See Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 18, 318. (With Euripides comes in the problem of the divided soul.)

² See *Discours de la Tragédie*, p. 69: 'Chimène y a fait son possible.'

³ Corneille always appeals beyond the public opinion of the time which he calls up as a background to his plays.

⁴ *Hamlet*, act iv, sc. 3.

Again, loose construction and improbability of events follow from the uncertain quality in the will of Victor Hugo's heroes. In *Hernani* he speaks of the mind of man as a fleeting force, blind and deaf :

. . . Je suis une force qui va ;

Agent aveugle et sourd de mystères funèbres.

But Corneille's characters, standing for the human spirit in its strength and liberty, leave no room for these subtle questionings, nor for the tense expectation with which we watch the trials that test and crush a Hamlet or a Lear. In the Shakespearean drama, below the exhibition of human weakness in conflict is the knowledge that at any moment an inner strength may well up and by a miracle defy the world. This is noticeable in *Hamlet*. The sense of the *unexpected* deliverance in character is absent both from Corneille and Racine.

Corneille's treatment of the Aristotelian theory of what is necessary or probable in the drama is indirectly affected by his strong feeling that the playwright must set his scene where and how he pleases, so only it expresses for him, clearly and unerringly, the author's intention.¹ If he keeps a unity of idea, rather than of event, a harmony and proportion of fact, he is expressing a work of art in the true spirit of the artist. The author's personality is the true *ἀνάγκη* of the Cornelian play.

' Je dis donc que le nécessaire, en ce qui regarde la poésie, n'est autre chose que *le besoin du poète pour arriver à son but ou pour y faire arriver ses acteurs*. Cette définition a son fondement sur les diverses acceptions du mot grec, *ἀναγκαῖον*, qui ne signifie pas toujours ce qui est absolument nécessaire, mais aussi quelquefois ce qui est seulement utile à parvenir à quelque chose.' ²

¹ *Discours des Trois Unités*, p. 104.

² *Discours de la Tragédie*, p. 94. Lemaître has pointed out (p. 53, *Corneille et la Poétique d'Aristote*) that Corneille uses *le nécessaire* here in two

In comparing the truth of poetry and the truth of fact, Corneille is led to a fair appreciation of Aristotle's meaning, because of his intimate consciousness as an artist of what is appropriate to drama, and of what is in fact dramatic and poetic truth. He does not limit it to what has happened, nor even to what might possibly happen: he does not question the rôle of the imagination in preparing dramatic material for the stage, but he is anxious that the author should not court comparisons and shock the common sense of his hearers by giving to the scenes of his play a geographical indication which appears to be realistic, and therefore is misleading.

'Ma scène est donc en un château d'un roi, proche d'une forêt; je n'en détermine ni la province ni le royaume: où vous l'aurez une fois placée, elle s'y tiendra.'¹

He begs the author to work without setting the limits of a particular time or place, and not to bring about a second reason for criticism by giving to some acts of his play a higher realistic probability than to others. Truth in art, he thinks, is not discordant with itself.

There is one point in connexion with the form of Corneille's drama which it will be convenient to discuss before entering into his conception of the unities, or of that of the unity and wholeness of a *pièce*, viz. the intrigue of his plays.

Unlike Racine, whose plays have great simplicity in the main action, Corneille is drawn to representing complicated

senses, as relating to plot, and also to character. But it remains true that the author's personality dominates both sets of conditions.

¹ *Préface de Clitandre*, p. 264. Only in the edition of 1664 did Corneille mark the king in this play as *un roi d'Écosse*. See also the *Examen de Médée*: 'Cette tragédie a été traitée en grec par Euripide et en Latin par Sénèque, et c'est sur leur exemple que je me suis autorisé à en mettre le lieu dans une place publique . . .'

intrigue on the stage.¹ He shows great ingenuity in manipulating the affairs of his pairs of lovers, and varying the action so as to cause perpetual and pleasant surprises to his audiences. He is also inventive in his *dénouements*, and is quite correct when he praises the novelty of the conclusion in the last scenes of *Nicomède*. His judgement is equally sound when he points out repeatedly that the fifth act of many of his pieces only emphasizes and completes what the fourth act has brought about.² How far both this self-criticism and the original power of combining strands of action were fostered by his earlier legal studies as well as by his Norman temperament, is a question. But at any rate on two separate occasions he is very strongly aware of a rational analogy between the maxims of the law court and those of the theatre. In the *Discours des Trois Unités*, when discussing the unity of time he appeals to the maxim in law by which favour should be enlarged and rigour restrained.

‘Nous avons une maxime en droit qu’il faut élargir la faveur et restreindre les rigueurs, *Odia restringenda, favores ampliandi* ; et je trouve qu’un auteur est assez gêné par cette contrainte, qui a forcé quelques-uns de nos anciens d’aller jusqu’à l’impossible.’³

Again, in treating of the unity of place, he appeals to the legal fiction as an analogy by which he would claim to substantiate the right of *fictions de théâtre*. In his opinion the dramatist should be able to plead for a *lieu théâtral*, an empty space for the utterance of emotion—as also for a time which may be any time, in which no discrepancy of date should distress the imagination.

‘Les jurisconsultes admettent des fictions de droit ; et je voudrois, à leur exemple, introduire des fictions de

¹ This is a necessary consequence of Corneille’s dramatic ideas. The manifestation of the will in action needs to be illustrated in its effects on other characters.

² *Discours du Poème dramatique*, pp. 28–9.

³ Corneille, *Discours des Trois Unités*, p. 112.

théâtre, pour établir un lieu théâtral qui ne seroit ni l'appartement de Cléopâtre, ni celui de Rodogune dans la pièce qui porte ce titre,¹ ni celui de Phocas, de Léontine, ou de Pulchérie, dans *Héraclius* ; mais une salle sur laquelle ouvrent ces divers appartements, à qui j'attribuerois deux privilèges : l'un, que chacun de ceux qui y parleroient fut présumé y parler avec le même secret que s'il étoit dans sa chambre ; l'autre, qu'au lieu que dans l'ordre commun il est quelquefois de la bienséance que ceux qui occupent le théâtre aillent trouver ceux qui sont dans leur cabinet pour parler à eux, ceux-ci pussent les venir trouver sur le théâtre, sans choquer cette bienséance, afin de conserver l'unité de lieu et la liaison des scènes.' ²

This was not really the recurrence to the open scene of the Elizabethan theatre,³ but the establishment of a new convention, and a new convention that was almost necessitated by the fact that Corneille's intrigue was too complicated for the form into which he attempted to throw his plays. This is what is meant when we are told that Corneille's plots are romantic and his form Greek.

But though dealing with complicated and sometimes cumbersome material, Corneille aimed at concentration and focusing of action in his drama. As in Shakespeare an episode of history made to submit to the 'two hours' traffic' of the stage became historical drama, so in Corneille the struggle of man's will with circumstances⁴ (a subject which the dramatist of the seventeenth century shared with the philosopher) was concentrated into a dramatic unity,

¹ Corneille has explained above that 'les personnes qui ont des intérêts opposés ne peuvent pas vraisemblablement expliquer leurs secrets en même place . . .'

² Corneille, *Discours des Trois Unités*, p. 121.

³ The Elizabethan platform stage could at any point in the play be given a particular designation and localized.

⁴ Love alone was not considered by Corneille to be a sufficient motive for the tragic drama ; it was *une passion trop chargée de faiblesse*. See also the *Discours du Poème dramatique*, p. 24, and Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, p. 266 : 'Love in itself is hardly a tragic motive.'

and Corneille claimed to bring the representation nearly within the two hours which he thinks of as the natural limit of human patience and attention :

‘ A ce que je viens de dire de la juste grandeur de l’action, j’ajoute un mot touchant celle de sa représentation, que nous bornons d’ordinaire à un peu moins de deux heures.’¹

It is well known that Corneille only gradually obliged his drama to submit to the unities of time, place, and event ; the dispute over *Le Cid* was the occasion on which the unities appeared as rules of art, and after that date Corneille applied them strictly to three of his plays, *Horace*, *Polyeucte*, and *Pompée*.² Otherwise he interpreted them very liberally, where the dramatic action could not be restricted, thus showing that the unity he conceived of was a dramatic unity. Here his experience of the stage had served him.³ The unities in fact were a convenient method of artistic restraint, and had grown out of a necessity felt by the French mind for such a restraint at all points of a dramatic subject involving conflict of a high order, where the subjects chosen were large, both in the historical and moral sense, when all ages of the world and all types of mental struggle were called up to form the background of the plot.⁴

Corneille gives many examples of the use and abuse of the unity of time, place, and event. The rule of time, he says, was the first to be recognized in Paris, and that was only known to him after the production of *Mélite*.⁵ Corneille

¹ Corneille, *Discours du Poème dramatique*, p. 30.

² Corneille, *Discours des Trois Unités*, p. 122.

³ ‘ Le commentaire dont je m’y sers le plus est l’expérience du théâtre ’ (*Discours du Poème dramatique*, p. 51).

⁴ This feeling for the unities lost its meaning when the subjects chosen needed less formal restraint or symbolic expression, and therefore the unity of action is the only one to take a permanent place in the technique of the drama.

⁵ *Examen de Clitandre*, p. 270.

would enlarge the time limit, doubtfully twelve or twenty-four hours, to thirty hours.¹

‘ . . . Pour moi je trouve qu’il y a des sujets si malaises à renfermer en si peu de temps, que non seulement je leur accorderais les vingt-quatre heures entières, mais je me servirois même de la licence que donne ce philosophe de les excéder un peu, et les pousserois sans scrupule jusqu’à trente.’²

Place, too, should not be too strictly defined. As Corneille points out, there is nothing about a unity of place in Aristotle nor in Horace:³

‘ Quant à l’unité de lieu, je n’en trouve aucun précepte ni dans Aristote ni dans Horace.’⁴

While it is reasonable not to expand the place too far, Corneille thinks that the action might well take place within the same town.⁵ No change of scene should take place in the same act.⁶ A curious touch in the discussion reveals the seventeenth century in Corneille. We cannot, he says, draw our kings and queens out of their royal *appartements* as the Greeks did.⁷

¹ Aristotle’s statement that ‘tragedy endeavours, so far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit’, was read as a law instead of as a reference to fact by Giraldi Cinthio in his *Discourse on Comedy and Tragedy*.

² *Discours des Trois Unités*, pp. 111, 112.

³ This was formulated by Castelvetro, and in reality derived from the idea of a unity of time; both being therefore referred to Italian critics of the Renaissance period.

⁴ *Discours des Trois Unités*, p. 117.

⁵ ‘Je tiens donc qu’il faut chercher cette unité exacte autant qu’il est possible; mais comme elle ne s’accommode pas avec toute sorte de sujets, j’accorderois très volontiers que ce qu’on feroit passer en une seule ville auroit l’unité de lieu’ (*Discours des Trois Unités*, p. 119; cf. also the setting of *Every man in his Humour*).

⁶ *Discours des Trois Unités*, p. 120.

⁷ ‘Nous ne prenons pas la même liberté de tirer les rois et les princesses de leur appartements . . .’ (*Ibid.*, p. 119).

The geographical indication should be avoided wherever possible: the spot should be left to the imagination at first—even if afterwards it were defined.¹

Corneille is remarkable, then, both for the freedom and independence of his treatment and also for his power of subduing a complicated action to the conventional form. His knowledge of the Greek drama was of great use to him in commenting on Aristotle and on Horace. He notices, for instance, the rapidity of action in Euripides and in Aeschylus.

yes 'Euripide, dans *les Suppliantes*, fait partir Thésée d'Athènes avec une armée, donner une bataille devant les murs de Thèbes, qui en étoient éloignés de douze ou quinze lieues, et revenir victorieux en l'acte suivant, et depuis qu'il est parti jusqu'à l'arrivée du messager qui vient faire le récit de sa victoire, Ethra et le chœur n'ont que trente-six vers à dire. C'est assez bien employé un temps si court. Eschyle fait revenir Agamemnon de Troie avec une vitesse encore toute autre . . .'²

And in his commentary on Aristotle, Corneille takes the liberty of shocking the ancients, 'd'autant qu'ils ne sont plus en état de me répondre.'³ The chief change which his dramatic experience encourages him to make is that of putting all the events in direct connexion with the plot. He thus does away with the long narrations by single characters.

yes 'Ce n'est pas que je veuille dire que quand un acteur parle seul, il ne puisse instruire l'auditeur de beaucoup de choses, mais il faut que ce soit par les sentiments d'une passion qui l'agite, et non pas par une simple narration.'⁴

In the *Examen de Clitandre* he says:

'Les monologues sont trop longs et trop fréquents en cette pièce; c'étoit une beauté en ce temps-là: les

¹ *Préface de Clitandre*, p. 264.

² Corneille, *Discours des Trois Unités*, p. 112.

³ *Préface de Clitandre*, p. 262.

⁴ Corneille, *Discours du Poème dramatique*, p. 45.

comédiens les souhaitoient, et croyoient y paroître avec plus d'avantage. La mode a si bien changé que la plupart de mes dernières ouvrages n'en ont aucun, et vous n'en trouverez point dans *Pompée*, *la Suite du Menteur*, *Théodore* et *Pertharite*, ni dans *Héraclius*, *Andromède*, *Œdipe* et *la Toison d'or*, à la réserve des stances.¹

In the intervening plays the monologue has gone through a kind of transition. Instead of being a recitation which rather delayed than advanced the action, it became a means of hastening it. Either the monologue takes the place of the introductory scenes of Shakespeare, as e.g. Émilie's speech at the opening of *Cinna*,² or it becomes psychological and self-revealing, as in her speech after the explanations with Fulvie,³ and Maxime's soliloquy after Émilie's repulse of him,⁴ or it gives a mass of information which is necessary the audience should know, as when Cinna explains to Émilie the motives of the conspiracy,⁵ or it carries on the action by showing how one character influences another, such is the case with Cinna's monologue before meeting his fate at the hands of Émilie, *cette aimable inhumaine*,⁶ or Auguste's invocation of himself, of the spirit of the Roman empire and of the gods, in the position into which Cinna's conspiracy has forced him.⁷

Again, as a true modern, Corneille avoids a *dénouement*, managed by means of *la machine*, and an illogical change of front which breaks up the drama.

‘ Dans le dénouement je trouve deux choses à éviter, le simple changement de volonté et la machine. Il n'y a pas grand artifice à finir un poème, quand celui qui a fait obstacle aux desseins des premiers acteurs, durant quatre actes, en désiste au cinquième, sans aucun évènement notable qui l'y oblige ; j'en ai parlé au premier Discours, et n'y ajouterai rien ici. La machine n'a pas plus d'adresse

¹ p. 273. ² *Cinna*, act i, sc. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, sc. 2 ; act iv, sc. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, act iv, sc. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, act i, sc. 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, act iii, sc. 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, act iv, sc. 2.

quand elle ne sert qu'à faire descendre un Dieu pour accommoder toutes choses, sur le point que les acteurs ne savent plus comment les terminer.'¹

Corneille felt the inner necessity of the will so strongly that he could not bear to see the absolute authority of Apollo invoked on the stage to bend an irreconcilable action to a forced conclusion. He would only admit supernatural agency when called up as in the *Medea* by the witchcraft of one of the characters,² or when acting through natural causes of fire and earthquake, storm, and tempest. The unity of action, again, is a matter of dramatic consistency rather than of single event. Once the play has begun everything should be explained, and have its connexion with the main action, which is therefore a whole of parts as well as a unity.

Corneille seems to share in the Aristotelian conception of oneness and wholeness. Not only does the work of art consist of parts related to a single governing idea, but these parts are scientifically correlated: they develop one from another in logical order; they also correspond to the picture of a living organism.³ Corneille then appeals, as we have seen, to the inner necessity of the artist's aim,⁴ to the outer necessity of presenting a pleasing whole to

¹ *Discours des Trois Unités*, p. 106; see also *Discours du Poème dramatique*, pp. 28, 45. *Discours de la Tragédie*, p. 75: 'Ces dénouements par des Dieux de machine sont fort fréquents chez les Grecs, dans des tragédies qui paroissent historiques, et qui sont vraisemblables à cela près: aussi Aristote ne les condamne pas tout à fait, et se contente de leur préférer ceux qui viennent du sujet. Je ne sais ce qu'en décidoient les Athéniens, qui étoient leurs juges; mais les deux exemples que je viens de citer montrent suffisamment qu'il seroit dangereux pour nous de les imiter en cette sorte de licence.'

² Corneille, *Discours des Trois Unités*, p. 106.

³ Aristotle, *Poetics*, xxiii. 1. See also Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, pp. 185 et seq.

⁴ *Discours de la Tragédie*, p. 94.

the audience,¹ and to the evolution of the play from the first act onwards.

‘Je voudrais donc que le premier acte contînt le fondement de toutes les actions, et fermât la porte à tout ce qu’on voudroit introduire d’ailleurs dans le reste du poème.’²

The stage is set in the first act in a way to control and limit the succeeding ones.³ This is expressed again and again, and very closely in the *Discours des Trois Unités* :

‘C’est ce qui me donne lieu de remarquer que le poète n’est pas tenu d’exposer à la vue toutes les actions particulières qui amènent à la principale : il doit choisir celles qui lui sont les plus avantageuses à faire voir, soit par la beauté du spectacle, soit par l’éclat et la véhémence des passions qu’elles produisent, soit par quelque autre agrément qui leur soit attaché, et cacher les autres derrière la scène, pour les faire connoître au spectateur, ou par une narration, ou par quelque autre adresse de l’art ; surtout il doit se souvenir que les unes et les autres doivent avoir une telle liaison ensemble, que les dernières soient produites par celles qui les précèdent, et que toutes aient leur source dans la protase que doit fermer le premier acte.⁴ . . . Le quatrième acte de *Cinna* demeure au-dessous des autres par ce manquement ; et ce qui n’étoit point une règle autrefois l’est devenu maintenant par l’assiduité de la pratique.’⁵

The form of the Cornelian drama thus bears out the spirit of its evolution, and it will be seen, on a closer examination of Corneille’s plays, and of the three *Discours* and the *Examens* (written thirty years after the production of *Mélite*) that his dramatic theory is all the more true from being a consequence of dramatic practice rather than its

¹ *Discours de la Tragédie*, p. 95.

² *Discours du Poème dramatique*, p. 43. See also p. 48, where Corneille expresses the need for relating the episodes to the central subject.

³ *Discours des Trois Unités*, p. 99 : ‘Il n’est pas besoin qu’on sache précisément tout ce que font les acteurs durant les intervalles qui les séparent, ni même qu’ils agissent lorsqu’ils ne paroissent point sur le théâtre ; mais il est nécessaire que chaque acte laisse une attente de quelque chose qui se doive faire dans celui qui le suit.’

⁴ p. 101.

⁵ p. 102.

starting-point. Corneille first expressed a dramatic idea in good acting plays, and after many years examined the connexion between the form of his own drama and that of the Greeks.¹

Corneille's idea of the drama, as we can deduce it both from his plays and from the three *Discours (du Poème dramatique, de la Tragédie, des Trois Unités)*, which he intended to precede complete editions of these plays, is true to the nature of his art. His theory of aesthetic is in the main sound, his influence in France has been lasting, and it is easily explicable that even in the revolt against cramping forms and rules which is one character of French nineteenth-century dramatic art, the writers of this and of the last century still gratefully acknowledge the inspiration of Corneille's high ideal of art, and his aptitude for natural and logical construction.² For he shares with all great dramatists the conception of the drama as belonging to the arts which give pleasure to humanity: he attacks those problems of conduct which are of universal interest; he presents a noble conception of humanity on the spiritual side; and in the presentation of his plays he has exercised choice and selection to a considerable extent, and never deviated from his own ideal as a dramatic artist. This power of conveying a universal appeal in restrained form is one which is characteristic of the art of the Latin races: and this art lends itself more readily to imitation and continuance than any more individual form of art.³ For this

¹ See note 1, p. 259.

² Cf. Lemaître, *Corneille et la Poétique d'Aristote*: 'Enfin son œuvre, telle qu'elle est, reste unique et souveraine dans l'histoire du théâtre.'

³ See M. Salomon Reinach's comparison of French and German art in his Oxford lectures, 1911, where he shows that the nations which can present an ideal conception have found imitators, while the Germans, e.g., tend to the expression of individual characteristics which cannot be transmitted in a form to arouse sympathy or imitation in others.

reason, perhaps, the French classical form has controlled to a great extent the development of the modern drama, while the Elizabethan drama remains without a modern representative. A Shakespearean play is partly dependent for its effect on the dissociation of scenes, thus suggesting a view of life that is not fully expressed ; the French classical drama on the connexion between them, thus expressing causes and consequences that are not fully apprehended in ordinary life.

But both types of drama depend for their efficient and coherent presentation of the main idea on the rapidity of the action. The French classical dramatist attended chiefly to the *liaison* between the scenes, and Racine's tragedies, for example, can only be played in the one way, in the way that he devised. But Shakespeare's, when mutilated for scenic purposes, as frequently happens on the modern stage, lose the power of transferring to the audience the sense of the swift march of events ; and thus one essential condition of the dramatic work of Shakespeare is lost, while the excision of whole scenes disturbs the original idea of the presentation of many aspects of life. Time and the modern stage have treated the French dramatist less hardly, owing to the strictly limited form of their plays.

CHAPTER V

MOLIÈRE AND THE FRENCH AND ITALIAN STAGE

MOLIÈRE'S connexion with the French stage lasted from 1645, when he became an actor, to the day of his death in 1673. During this period of twenty-eight years he was an indefatigable actor and playwright. He wrote and presented to the public thirty plays; the masterpieces of his art all date from within the last fifteen years of his life. In a sense Molière is a link between the two great tragic writers, Corneille and Racine, for he produced some of Corneille's last plays and acted in others, while he was of use to Racine (as Racine acknowledged) in his first efforts.

The early education of Molière was valuable to him as a dramatic writer. He was educated at the Jesuit Collège de Clermont,¹ where he learned to be an excellent Latin scholar. Though little or no attention was paid to Greek in these Jesuit institutions, and though Latin oratory was the basis of their instruction, the pupils of the Jesuits also read the Latin poets and dramatists, and practised an easy and correct French. It is said, too, that they presented masques and comic interludes (always in Latin), and the quips of the Prologue to the Westminster Play may remind us of the kind of Latin macaronic humour which Molière saw displayed on the stage in the courtyard of the college.

Molière showed considerable power of dealing with more abstruse subjects; he made his mark in logic and philosophy,² and after he left the college he studied law for

¹ Now the Lycée Louis-le-Grand; rebuilt during the Second Empire.

² 'S'il fut bon humaniste, il devint encore plus grand philosophe' (La Grange, *Préface de l'Édition de Molière de 1682*).

a time, and mastered the technicalities of legal terms. The stage, however, had the supreme attraction for him, and he tried to set up a company known as *L'Illustre Théâtre*, but it was unsuccessful in Paris, and Molière therefore went to Lyon in 1653. Here he presented *L'Étourdi*, and at Béziers *Dépit Amoureux*. In 1658 he moved to Rouen, with the object of effecting as soon as possible an entry into Paris. The long-desired protection was at last granted to him by Monsieur, the king's brother.

When Molière's troupe played before the king, they acted Corneille's *Nicomède*, but added, with the king's permission, Molière's slight farce, *Le Docteur Amoureux*, Molière himself playing the doctor. The king immediately afterwards granted to Molière the use of the Salle du Petit Bourbon,¹ which was occupied on alternate days by a troupe of Italian actors.

It is comparatively easy to trace in Molière's dramatic work the influence of his early education and acquirements. Even in the early farce, *La Jalousie du Barbouillé*, *Le Docteur* makes excellent fooling out of the scholastic philosophers.² Most of the liberal arts are laid under contribution, and the pedantry of those who practise them is ridiculed by Molière. *Métaphraste*, in *Dépit Amoureux*,³ has a flow of elaborate pedantry, which is only checked by Albert's ringing a bell close to his ear. *Panrace* and *Marphurius* in *Le Mariage Forcé*⁴ are caricatures of an Aristotelian and a Pyrrhonian. We have also the astrologer in *Les Amants Magnifiques*,⁵ Scapin's account of a *procès* in *Les Fourberies de Scapin*,⁶ and, of course, numberless satirical

¹ This building stood between the Old Louvre and the Church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois. In 1660 it was pulled down to make room for the colonnade which forms the eastern façade of the Louvre. The Jardin de l'Infante is on the site of the stage.

² Sc. 2.

³ Act ii, sc. 6.

⁴ Scs. 4, 5.

⁵ Act iv, sc. 3.

⁶ Act ii, sc. 5.

references to doctors. Their characters are satirized in *L'Amour Médecin*¹ and *Le Médecin malgré lui*.² La Flèche takes up the parable in *L'Avare*,³ and doctors are again derided in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*,⁴ Argan soliloquizes about them in *Le Malade Imaginaire*,⁵ and the doctors come in person into the same play.⁶

We can also trace in the varied gallery of his characters observations put together by Molière during his adventurous strolling through Provence, Languedoc, and Normandy. The scene of the vivacious little comedy, *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, is laid in Angoulême, and the humours of the provinces are here excellently commented upon. *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* comes from Limoges. The peasants in *Don Juan* speak a broad dialect, which has little to do with the Sicilian scene, and has been gathered from the French villages near the capital. Thibaut and Perrin and Lucas in *Le Médecin malgré lui* speak a dialect of the same type, which has great resemblance with that used in Cyrano's play, *Le Pédant joué*. Molière has added to his portraits certain types that if not new to the stage, had only before been slightly indicated:⁷ such are the maids, half friends, half servants, having a keen eye to the absurdities of their masters. Nicole in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, Dorine in *Tartufe*, Toinette in *Le Malade Imaginaire*, are examples of this new type on the stage. And it is worth notice that such characters fill in a likely and persuasive

¹ Act ii, scs. 2, 3, 4, 5; act iii, scs. 1, 2, 6. Here the names but slightly conceal, and in fact clearly suggest, those of four eminent doctors of the day.

² Act ii, scs. 2, 4; act iii, scs. 6, 7.

³ Act ii.

⁴ Act i.

⁵ Act i, sc. 1.

⁶ The relation of Molière to the Faculty of Medicine, and the exact nature of his satire has often been fully commented on.

⁷ e.g. by Corneille in his comedies, where 'La nourrice' fills something like the same rôle as the maids in Molière, as she is less shadowy than the traditional stage confidante.

manner the rôle of *confidente* to the mistress or daughter of the house, a part artificially filled in earlier plays by the stage *confidente*, but here made to rest upon a natural and human relation very common in the middle class which Molière knew and delighted to paint.

Molière's plays are filled with many other studies from actual life ; for example, we can trace many aspects of the rich *bourgeois* who attempts to rise in the world. In *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* he appears as the suitor, Monsieur Tibaudier, who has the luck to be married out of spite by the lady he is wooing ; in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, Monsieur Jourdain is already married, but his careful level-headed wife cannot balance his extravagance ; in *George Dandin*, the husband has made an aristocratic *mariage de convenance*, and is made to suffer in his personal dignity by his wife and her relations. In *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* the hero comes to Paris for the purpose of making a rich marriage, and is fleeced and mocked at.¹

The fact that in the Salle du Petit Bourbon Molière's troupe played alternately with Italian actors and probably used some of the same 'sets' for his scene, is not without importance, as tending to draw together the methods of Molière's comedy and those of the *commedia dell' arte*, but a study of Molière's early plays and their sources is a more fruitful means of discovering how far he was indebted to the Italian comedy-of-masks. The little farces with which he was accustomed to enliven the end of the late afternoon spent in presenting one of Corneille's tragedies, have with two exceptions (*La Jalousie du Barbouillé* and *Le Médecin volant*) been lost to us, but we have the record of the titles of several others—*Le Docteur amoureux*, *Les*

¹ Of Molière, La Grange says : ' Il observait les manières et les mœurs de tout le monde . . . on peut dire qu'il a joué tout le monde . . . ' (*Préface de 1681*).

Trois Docteurs rivaux, *Le Maître d'École*, *Le Docteur pédant*, *Gros René écolier*. There are others too, doubtfully attributed to Molière, but in some of which we seem to be able to trace the genesis of his later comedies, such are *Gorgibus dans le sac*, probably worked up later in *Les Fourberies de Scapin* and *Le Fagoteux*, perhaps the first sketch of *Le Médecin malgré lui*. The titles themselves suggest that Molière has borrowed considerably from Italian farce :¹ while the movement in the two slight plays that remain to us recalls the Italian farce, with an admixture of the vigorous fun of the native French street farce which Molière must have seen on the Pont Neuf and at country fairs. They have the same relation to his later plays as the blustering scene acted for advertisement by travelling companies outside the booth of a fair had to the complete play to which it was desired to draw attention. *La Jalousie du Barbouillé* takes its *motif* straight from Boccaccio, but is the rough material from which the character comedy of *George Dandin* emerged later on. The handling of the dialogue in these farces was always left to the wit of the actor at the moment ; it does not therefore strictly represent Molière.² *Le Médecin volant* was probably more fully written down by Molière himself ;³ the subject of this piece was an Italian humorous episode already freely used by comedians. There was, however, a French flavour and briskness about the treatment which remove these farces from pantomime and connect them with the national farce. When Molière took a story or episode and rewrote it, it remained Molière's, and his stamp

¹ Thus *Le Médecin volant* is derived from the Italian farce *Il medico volante*.

² *Lettre de Rousseau à Brossette* du 28 octobre 1731, t. ii, p. 197. See also Gherardi : *Le Théâtre italien, ou le Recueil de toutes les scènes françaises qui ont été jouées sur le théâtre italien de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne*. MDCXCV.

³ Les Frères Parfaict, *Histoire de l'ancien théâtre italien*, Préface.

is upon it. It is no longer foreign, but French. Thus, although he borrowed freely from two other nations, the Spaniards and the Italians, the definitive form given to every story he touched is nearly always Molière's own. It has only been realized of late how much he drew from Spanish material ;¹ but he borrowed from Spanish dramatic story the outlines of the plot and not the characterization of his personages. In the same way he borrowed from the Italians movement and method.² From the French farce he took the racy conversational language, and his humour was emphatically French—caustic, pointed, but full of *bonhomie*. The farce of all three countries which Molière laid under contribution was the popular farce, not the cultivated comedy of Latin origin. For Molière belonged to a bourgeois family, rooted in the popular tradition of the middle class, and drawing thence richness of phrase, fullness of experience, and a certain general cleanliness of tone, from which niceties of speech are conspicuously absent. The realism of Molière does not spring from an observation of human nature as seen from above or from aside : it is the sympathetic observation of life in its most familiar aspects presented in a form that itself was familiar to the audience.

If we bear in mind the fact just emphasized, that Molière used popular farce rather than the cultivated Latin play as

¹ Among the 240 volumes in the possession of Molière at the time of his death were some Spanish plays : ' . . . il est certain qu'il y avait là un certain nombre de tomes de Lope de Vega, de Moreto, de Calderón, et d'autres écrivains espagnols. On n'a pas à craindre de se tromper en citant : *El Perro del hortelano*, *La Discreta enamorada*, *El Acero de Madrid*, de Lope de Vega ; *El desden con el desden*, de Moreto ; *Casa con dos puertas mala es de guardar*, de Calderón, &c.' (Louis Moland, *Molière et la Comédie italienne*, Préface).

² Louis Moland, *Molière et la Comédie italienne* : ' L'action dramatique ne paraît pas avoir été très naturelle à l'esprit français, qui a toujours été fort enclin aux discours ' (p. 5).

his model, it will not be a matter of very great importance to discover whether he obtained his material direct from Spain and Italy or by circuitous routes. Many plots and situations were the common property of the three nations in Molière's time. Thus the plots of *El Burlador de Sevilla* and of *Don Garcia de Navarra*, appropriated by Molière, came to him in an Italian version, though the originals were Spanish.¹ Then, again, Molière appears to use the name of Polichinelle for a character in the Premier Intermède of *Le Malade Imaginaire*, with small reference to the Italian original of the name. Molière's Polichinelle serenades his mistress in Italian, it is true, but his further history on Molière's scene is frankly that of a Parisian bourgeois who is seized by the watch for wandering about at night and gets himself off by a bribe of six pistoles.² Many other of the Italian 'masques', or personages with fixed characters in different plays, were apparently unknown to Molière, or at any rate were not used by him with reference to their Italian characteristics. This is the case with Truffaldino.³ In certain directions, however, he worked on the lines of the Italian *Commedia dell' arte* or improvised drama, in which the framework and plot were fixed, and the characters or 'masques' had well-known characteristics from which they did not deviate, but in which the actual stage dialogue was invented by the actor to suit his part.

In this process of finding himself in his art the Italian *Commedia dell' arte* furnished Molière with some of his earliest material. Molière, in his wanderings, had classified and used local and provincial characteristics; the Italian 'masque' was the result of a long history of the classification of local types and their presentation by a naturally vivacious and histrionic people at their fairs and carnivals.

¹ Louis Moland, *Molière et la Comédie italienne*, Préface.

² *Le Malade Imaginaire*, Premier Intermède.

³ In *L'Étourdi*.

Bologna supplied the character of the pedant, Venice that of the merchant, Pantalon; the captain was a man of Spanish race, and the intriguing valet hailed from Naples. These four types were the older and more prominent ones in Italian farce. Pairs of lovers and *soubrettes* to intrigue with the valets completed the usual cast. In the seventeenth century the characters still showed their local origin by their dialect on the stage. Character was shown by the action, but not by descriptive speech, and very little by dialogue. To the great gain of the stage Molière imported Italian action into French comedy.¹

It was especially in his early plays that Molière used the 'masques' that were the traditional characters of the Italian farce. So *L'Étourdi* owes much to *L'Inavvertito* by Beltrame; *Dépit Amoureux* to Nicolò Secchi's *L'Interesse* (published 1581, but composed some years earlier). Besides the likeness in the plot, and a resemblance between Zucca's monologue in *L'Interesse* and Mascarille's in *Dépit Amoureux*, also between Flaminio's cross-examination of the valet of Fabio in the earlier play, and Éraсте's scene with Mascarille in the later play,² and Pandolfo and Ricciardo's scene reproduced in that between Albert and Polidore,³ there are similar characters introduced into both plays, such as the Pedant. But Molière has added certain scenes which are of the nature of comedy rather than pure farce—such as the quarrel and reconciliation between Éraсте and Lucile,⁴ and the scene between Gros René and Marinette,⁵ which is a pendant to it: this prepares us for the further development of Molière's art—farce with an admixture of comedy,

¹ 'Lorsque celle-ci vint s'installer en France, elle apporta par conséquent à notre théâtre les exemples dont il avait le plus grand besoin; elle enseignait l'action à notre comédie qui penchait naturellement vers la conversation et la tirade, et qui finit toujours par tomber de ce côté-là' (Louis Moland, *Molière et la Comédie italienne*, p. 32).

² Act i, sc. 4.

³ Act iii, sc. 4.

⁴ Act iv, sc. 3.

⁵ Ibid., sc. 4.

including characters that though still 'masques', were newly created. Thus he invented other 'masques', French in type and new to the stage, by classifying, less rigidly than the Italians had done, the result of his observation of local, professional, and class behaviour and mannerisms; the valet who deceives every one for the sake of his master, and sometimes his master for what he conceives to be his interest, is a new variant of the Italian rascal of *Les Fourberies de Scapin*; the Mascarille in *L'Étourdi* shows a slightly different facet of the conception of the *valet trompeur* from that of Mascarille in *Dépit Amoureux* or in *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, while Sganarelle is a new creation. Masquerading as a doctor in *Le Médecin volant*, *Le Médecin malgré lui*, and *Don Juan*, the Sganarelle of the plays has little beyond the name to recall the character of the 'masque'. It is true that he is always destined to be the butt of the more astute characters and deceived by them, but there the resemblance ends. His part in the plot of *Sganarelle* and *Le Médecin malgré lui* is that of the husband, while in *L'École des Maris* he is the guardian of Agnès, in *L'Amour Médecin* he is the father.

That the 'masque' of Sganarelle had considerably more elasticity than that of Mascarille is proved partly, as we have seen, from the different situations of Sganarelle with regard to the other characters in each play, but also from the further indication of the costume, which varied according to these circumstances, while the costume of the typical Italian 'masque' did not vary, and itself proclaimed the personage represented.

X Lastly, Molière produced comedy with an admixture of farce. In such plays as *L'Avare* and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* the 'masque' is characteristic of some of the characters, but in others the type is set from the direct observation of life, and is not developed by a conventional process. Thus Molière heightens the effect of reality in his comedies by

invoking a contrast within the play between convention and reality, farce and true comedy. The secondary characters in these plays seem more farcical and less individually presented than the primary ones, though their perspective in relation to the main plot is always artistically shown. Tartufe is far more delicately studied than Orgon: the character of Orgon suggests the handling of farce. In *Le Misanthrope* the farcical element is abandoned, and Molière gets his effect by throwing the light on a central character contrasted with others in low relief and more fixed in type.

Of the troupes of Italian actors who came to France from the sixteenth century onwards, the most famous was that of the 'Gelosi' (*jaloux de plaire*), invited by Henry III in 1576. They became powerful rivals to the *confrères de la Passion*, who at that time and up to the arrival of the Italians were enjoying a monopoly of representations in Paris. After their departure another troupe appeared in 1584-5 (the 'Comici confidenti'), and the 'Gelosi' reappeared in 1588, but only for a short time, and it was not till the civil wars were over and Henry IV married Marie de Médicis, that there was any thought of recalling them. The marriage was the occasion for many gaieties in the general rejoicings after the peace, and in 1600 a reconstituted troupe of 'Gelosi' came again to Paris. It is said that one of the actors, Francesco Andreini, who played the captain, was himself an excellent linguist, speaking Greek and Turkish, and he was perhaps the first to use the jargon, said to be suggested by the latter language, which in the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* imposed on Monsieur Jourdain.¹ The types of the Italian 'masques' had become very clearly

¹ 'Le capitaine Spavente, envoyant son valet Trappola à l'ambassadeur du grand-sophi, avait de faire les recommandations suivantes: "Tu diras ainsi: Salamalechi benum Sultanum, et lui te répondra: Alecchi mesalem safa ghillyd'" (Louis Moland, *Molière et la Comédie italienne*, p. 51).

marked out. Harlequin et Pierrot appear as accomplices in the intrigue. The women actors are distinguished into the heroine, the *soubrette*, and the old woman. Other characters were sometimes added. Flaminio Scala, the director of the troupe, has left on record a list of his collections of plays. They included melodramatic and heroic pieces as well as farces : and there was an attempt at scenic effect, though the actual scene was nearly always the Italian piazza. It is noticeable that in all these pieces of three-act length the farcical element never entirely predominated, while in the melodramas and heroic pieces some buffoonery was always introduced.¹ Is it not probable that Molière was influenced in his view of comedy by his knowledge of the Italian actors' art, at this moment of great spontaneity and suggestiveness ? Farce in these Italian plays was used very much as it was on the Elizabethan stage : to give dramatic relief, and to occupy the scene while the actors in the principal plot were resting, or sometimes simply to mark the end of an episode, or scene, or act. Another point to be noticed is that not only did the comedians who were accustomed to improvisation sometimes act in a set play in which all the dialogue was written, but a play which was successful as an impromptu one often developed into a comedy in which all the parts were written out.² Again, the plots of well-known plays, such as Groto's *La Emilia*, which Molière drew upon to some extent for *L'Étourdi*, furnished situations which the impromptu artist used as a theme upon which to embroider his own dialogue.

The native French farce was perhaps richer in character-study of individuals, and it certainly had a larger element of criticism and satire than the Italian farce. The politics and manners of the time were satirized by French writers,

¹ Louis Moland, *Molière et la Comédie italienne*, p. 71.

² *Ibid.*, p. 103.

and the wit of the actor was often not satisfied without making a recognizable portrait of some public character. So Gros-Guillaume is said to have taken off the mannerism of a certain magistrate so successfully that he was thrown into prison in consequence. Molière inherits this trait of the French farce. His doctors are portraits; and the tendency of French criticism has been to find a resemblance between many of his other characters and actual individuals. But this tendency to portraiture was sometimes overborne by the necessity felt by the dramatic writer to create parts for the members of his troupe.

The French and Italian comedy, then, existed side by side in France: the one was more impulsive, the other more stereotyped, in form and action the Italian was developed, while the French was undeveloped and had not yet secured any link with cultivated comedy. As time went on a new troupe of Italian actors—this time called the 'Fedeli'—were invited to France. This was in 1618 and 1621, during the years of influence of Marie de Médicis. Then too the director, Andreini, published five of his pieces, for like Molière, he was both playwright and actor. But the desire for scenery and spectacle was overcoming the art of the 'Fedeli', and the moment of the origins of Italian opera was also that of the decline of the *Commedia dell' arte*.

Thus during the ministry of Mazarin, when Italian art was much encouraged in France, the troupes of actors brought a *répertoire* which was partly farcical and partly operatic. Among other characters they brought Scaramuccia or Scaramouche, the Neapolitan adventurer. It is to this character that Molière alludes in *Le Sicilien*:

Le ciel s'est habillé ce soir en Scaramouche,¹
for Scaramuccia was always dressed in black.

¹ *Le Sicilien*, sc. 1. Le Boulanger de Chalussay, author of *Élomire*

The rivalry excited by the presence of these actors instigated French writers to attempt imitations of Italian art. One of these imitations, *Amor Malato* (*L'Amour Malade*), was a ballet set to music by Lulli.¹ The entrée of the doctors in the ballet, and the satire of the learned professions, prepared the public mind to enjoy Molière's *L'Amour Médecin*, which appeared eight years later, in 1665.

Another more famous analogue is the Italian comedy *Il Convitato di Pietra* (*Le Convié de Pierre*), which appeared in 1657; the subject of this was worked up by Molière in *Don Juan, ou le Festin de Pierre*, in 1665. The original plot was Spanish, but was used as material by Italian and French writers, and probably reached Molière in a much modified version. In the Italian version, as reported by Gueulette and others, Harlequin and Pantaloon give the farcical element: thus Harlequin is the occasion for the entrance of Don Juan, and appears doing comic business when Don Juan is saved from shipwreck. He is here the *valet bouffon*, and introduces farcical scenes between the incidents of the invitation to the statue and the scene at the tomb, which he enlivens by crying after Don Juan as he disappears into hell to claim the wages due to him as valet. The transition between this version and that of Molière is quite explicable. Molière, like the actors of the *Commedia dell' arte*, used the framework of the story, and inserted in it his own words: in the case of Molière these expressed a witty and ironical criticism of life. The *Don Juan* of Molière is a creation which transforms the worn plot and *hypocondre*, declares that Molière received from Scaramuccia lessons in pantomime:

Chez le grand Scaramouche il va soir et matin,
Là, le miroir en main et ce grand homme en face,
Il n'est contorsion, posture ni grimace
Que ce grand écolier du plus grand des bouffons
Ne fasse et ne refasse en cent et cent façons.

¹ In 1657.

gives it new life by applying the story to contemporary French manners and character. He retains the farcical element in Sganarelle. As in Molière's other reconstructions, the story is henceforward his own. From another source, this time that of the regular Italian comedy, he obtained material which he used in *Tartufe*. The play known as *Lo Ipocrito*, by Il Aretino,¹ is written round the character of the pious hypocrite made familiar to us in Molière's play. His entry on the scene with lowered eyes and a breviary under his arm, with his meagre, worn black mantle wrapped around him, suggests the mask of religion. *Lo Ipocrito*, however, soliloquizes as he enters :

Qui ne sait feindre ne sait vivre, &c.,

and it is only when he hears a step that he changes his tone to the Latin prayer :

Neque in ira tua corripias me.

Molière's *Tartufe*, who enters the scene with the famous glance at Dorine and uttering the words

Laurent, serrez ma haire avec ma discipline . . .²

is a more complete and artistically conceived character. But *Lo Ipocrito* has some points in common with *Tartufe*. He too is sensual and alive to the attractions of beauty and of good cheer : he too is a trusted inmate of the family whose peace he destroys—*Il corromprait le printemps!* says Gemma of him—but the old play of *Lo Ipocrito* is more consistent than Molière's. The impostor is not altogether unmasked. He pacifies the family and retains a certain influence over them. The daughters who have been excited by his evil counsels to give themselves to lovers are married off to the same men. Poetical justice is not done on the hypocrite through the medium of a justice-

¹ The Venetian edition appeared in 1542.

² Act iii, sc. 2.

loving and all-powerful king. Thus there is no dramatic *dénouement*, and no forced reconciliation between the elements of tragedy and the necessity of the happy ending which was in Molière's day considered proper to comedy. The play ends as in the natural world—less dramatically—with some disapprobation of the hypocrite but no complete exhibition of a moral. But on the other hand how much more trenchant is Molière's view of vice, and how deeply cut are the lines of character he draws! Tartufe is loathsome and repellent on the stage: he arouses greater repulsion than an actor in pure comedy would do, but there are foils which enhance the realism of this characterization, e.g. Orgon, with his exaggerated gullibility, while criticism within the play itself is represented by the clear sense of Dorine. Molière, then, has given his comedy richness and depth by marking within the play many different planes of characterization.

After the Italian actors had left Paris in 1659, Molière's company played on the days formerly claimed by the Italians, viz. Sunday, Tuesday, and Friday, which were better days for collecting an audience. One of the first plays represented under the new conditions was *Les Précieuses Ridicules*. According to the author of the *Nouvelles Nouvelles*, the Italians had already attempted this subject,¹ but it is evident that anything like criticism as distinct from mere imitation of the mannerisms of the *Précieuses* is entirely due to Molière. For his play of *Sganarelle, ou le Cocu Imaginaire*, played in 1660, there was a more definite Italian precedent, though the version generally quoted, *Il Ritratto, ovvero Arlecchino cornuto per opinione*, has been shown to be of later date than Molière's play.² *Don Garcie de Navarre*,

¹ 'Molière eut recours aux Italiens ses bons amis, accommoda au théâtre français les *Précieuses* qui avaient été jouées sur le leur.'

² Louis Moland, *Molière et la Comédie italienne*, p. 255.

produced in 1660, on the occasion of Molière's opening the Salle du Palais-Royal¹ for his troupe, was derived from a written Italian play, *Le gelosie fortunate del principe Rodrigo*, itself drawn from a Spanish original. Molière, in his attempt to produce a heroic comedy has lost something of the fire and grace of the Italian original. But with the appearance of *L'École des Maris* in 1661 begins the new epoch, in which Molière only borrowed a touch here and a scene there from the Italian, and in which his genius shows its own independent force.

When in 1662 the Italian actors revisited Paris, they found themselves obliged to accept the less convenient days for their representations, and to take a share of the expense of keeping up the Salle du Palais-Royal. Another and more subtle change was, however, to take place in the relation of the dramatic art of Italy and France. For five years after their arrival the Italians played their own *répertoire*, but one of their actors, Domenico, began to modify the Italian 'masque' of *Arlecchino*, to give the character more wit and wickedness than *naïveté*, and thus make it more acceptable to a French audience, and the new plays written to the taste of Domenico sustained the new conception. Harlequin got himself into increasingly equivocal situations, out of which only his cleverness of mind and pantomimic agility could rescue him. The costume, always symbolic, was modified too, and showed a more subtle intermixture of colours.² This was really a compromise between French and Italian farce. Harlequin, like Sganarelle in *Le Médecin volant*, became *le roi des fourbes*. The compromise was also

¹ This building, formerly arranged by Richelieu for the production of his *Mirame*, stood at the corner of the rues Saint-Honoré and de Valois, and was the only hall in Paris designed and built as a playhouse.

² See Riccoboni, *Histoire du théâtre italien*, and Les Frères Parfaict, *Histoire de l'ancien théâtre italien*, ed. 1753.

seen in the introduction, not only of songs and phrases in French into the Italian play, but of whole scenes.¹ It is true that this may be considered a development of the habit of Italian farce, which had from the origin represented characters as speaking in their provincial dialect, and it may also belong in part to the development of written plays from impromptu farce. Italian epic had freely used French and Provençal for treating episodes in the main action,² and the French comic drama had included foreign characters speaking their own language. So Jacques Grévin, in the sixteenth century included in the characters of *Les Ébahis*, Panthaleone, who used both French and Italian.³ But the habit among the Italian players in Paris marks the moment when the influence of Molière had become the strongest dramatic influence there, and the Italians were yielding to it. So an Italian play, *La Creduta Maschio*, developing the plot of *Dépit Amoureux*, was certainly presented later than Molière's piece, and a version of *Don Juan* was played by Italian actors after Molière's first sketch of the play had been given.

After Molière's death in 1673 Lulli and the opera occupied the Salle du Palais-Royal, and the French and Italian players moved to a room near the Rue de Guénégaud,⁴ where they acted on alternate days up to 1680, when a separation took place.⁵ In course of time the repertory of the Italians

¹ This happened from 1668 onwards; for example, in *Il Teatro senza Commedia*.

² Possibly in imitation of Dante, Fazio degli Uberti, in his *Dittamondo*, included sections in French and Provençal (probably written about 1350).

³ Act ii, sc. 3; act v, sc. 1. See also Munday's adaptation of *Il Fedele*, under the name of *The pleasaunt and fine conceited comedie of Two Italian Gentlemen*, where Latin and Italian phrases are used by the characters. The date is 1584.

⁴ Formerly the Jeu de Paume de la Bouteille.

⁵ The troupe of the Théâtre Guénégaud joined that of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and then became known as the Comédie Française.

came to consist almost entirely of French pieces, and presented the plays of Dufresny, Regnard, and others, in which French satire and criticism of life had entirely overcome the spirit of the old *Commedia dell' arte*. In 1697 this was perhaps the cause of the downfall of the Italian company, for they were forbidden to play, on the ground that allusions had been seen in a play called *La Fausse Prude* to Madame de Maintenon.¹

We may attribute to the Italians, especially during the earlier years of Molière's time in Paris, considerable influence over the great French dramatist's method. Undoubtedly the mass of dramatic material at hand, the competition with actors belonging to a nation so quick to turn incident to dramatic account, the existence of well-known stage types of which it was legitimate to make use—all this drew Molière in a certain direction, or rather perhaps withdrew him from the effort to give himself to high comedy, which Boileau had desired for him. His characters come upon the stage and explain themselves with an Italian rapidity of action: their names are Italian with the termination softened to French: the Italian types are all there. But in Molière's development we can see much more than this. He constructs on the stage what is to become the material for a theory of comedy distinct from the English, the Spanish, or the Italian ideals: nearest, perhaps, in spirit to the English, in its inclusion of many planes of interest and many impressions of life on the stage, but dominated always by the conscious art that is especially characteristic of France. Within the play itself are all the elements which arouse reflection, which produce a sense of what is true and false in life, of what is beautiful, and of what is abhorrent and evil. Each play is itself material for a moral and rational judgement. In order to obtain a balanced view of

¹ See note 2, p. 263.

life, it is not necessary to contrast with the play the life of the audience, or the beauty and the sorrow of the real world, as is the case in Shakespeare's earlier comedies. These impressions of reality in life are faithfully reflected in Molière's plays themselves, however limited his frame, with all their shades of colour and their scales of feeling. Molière thus produces a representation which is adequate to his material even if he is constrained to use only a few tones or to make images in low relief. The conditions of dramatic representation on the stage are to Molière the only true and legitimate limitations of his art.

CHAPTER VI

MOLIÈRE, FROM *L'ÉCOLE DES MARIS* TO *LE MISANTHROPE*

L'École des Maris, first acted in 1661, is the first play of Molière's in which we see him working with complete artistic freedom. It is true that he may have owed something—certainly not much—to earlier writers who had made use of a similar theme.¹ But Molière has taken this situation of comedy and developed it, as he so often did, in a way to give it moral as well as dramatic significance. For instance, a scene in the second act may be traced to one of Boccaccio's stories; used already by Lope de Vega; Isabelle in *L'École des Maris* sends a letter to her lover by her guardian under pretext of returning one she has received, and will not open.² But the ruse of Isabelle (as well as the relation of the two guardians) is made to serve a new purpose in Molière, for Isabelle and Valère may legitimately love one another; while in Lope de Vega's story the rivals are father and son, and the conduct of the heroine in making a tool of the father somewhat strains probability as well as good taste. The two guardians in Molière are also elderly lovers, but an attempt is made in *L'École des Maris* to discern whether confidence and kindness on the part of the elders will arouse confidence and kindness in return. Lisette, who is the *soubrette* of the new order, just outside the main action, and therefore able to look upon it with cool sense and judgement,

¹ In the *Adelphi* of Terence there are two brothers of dissimilar character, who try educational experiments on two young wards. In the case of Terence the wards were boys.

² Act ii.

expresses the view held by a reasonable woman of the restrictions used by Sganarelle.¹ *L'École des Maris*, then, like so many of Molière's plays, proposes an ethical question to us in scenes of pure comedy.

The setting is still that of the Italian *piazzetta*, though we are told *la scène est à Paris*. The house of Valère no doubt occupied one side of the square, and those of Sganarelle and Ariste the other. The action took place in the open air, and it is to be noticed that Molière's dramatic incidents are carefully moulded to lend colour to the probability of this. So in Act ii Sganarelle's anger and jealousy are dramatically used to prevent him from accepting Valère's courteous suggestion that he should enter the house.²

Again, the encounters by night which some critics have thought improbable in Molière's play³ were necessitated by the Italian arrangement of scenery round an open square. So Isabelle meets Sganarelle on her way to see Valère, and a *commissaire* and a *notaire* appear in the square at the psychological moment when their services are required.⁴ All the action is in this open space.⁵

¹ Act i, sc. 2.

² Valère. Voulez-vous pas entrer ?
Sganarelle. Il n'en est pas besoin.
Valère. Monsieur, de grâce !
Sganarelle. Non, je n'irai pas plus loin.

Act ii, sc. 2.

³ 'Des scènes nocturnes d'une invraisemblance choquante' (Auger, t. ii, p. 364, *Œuvres de Molière*).

⁴ Act iii.

⁵ It may probably be a result of seventeenth-century tradition in France that the stage there is much less encumbered with furniture and accessories than in England. A troupe of French actors are so accustomed to make excellent by-play without stage properties, and also to play up to the main group and action on the stage that the accessories, which are a haven of refuge to the English actor when he attempts to fill in a pause, would only be in the way on a French stage. The peculiar circular walk by which an English actor expresses distress of mind, and which enables him to negotiate a mass of furniture, is a thing unknown in ordinary life,

The types in the play before us are still mainly those of the French and Italian 'masque'. The lover, Valère, has the name and qualities of the typical stage lover. Isabelle and Léonor are sufficiently alike to counterfeit one another, and Isabelle is the regular *intrigante* of Italian comedy. Léonor, however, in spite of her semi-Italian name, is one of a new set of heroines which Molière was to create in his later plays: sincere and amenable to reason, she is nevertheless vivacious, and full of taste and individuality. At the *dénouement*, while she cannot approve of Isabelle's conduct, she sees quite clearly that it is through Sganarelle that the catastrophe has come about.¹

Though not a Henriette, Léonor has some of the qualities of bright rational insight which are seen together with other and more subtle charms in Molière's later heroines.² Lisette,

where assuredly the furniture would have to yield to his mood. It is equally unknown on the French stage, where nothing tangible would be allowed to interfere with an access of emotion, but where also this emotion is not expressed in fidgety or clumsy movements. On the French stage the amount of space may be enlarged or contracted at will, but it is, as in the time of Molière, comparatively empty space. See on this subject C. E. Montague, *Dramatic Values*, p. 117: 'The stage in France always offers you a real picture, in the painter's sense; it is composed, and the composition has usually a savoursome severity—if there is a sofa, it is for some one to faint upon presently; if there is a table, it is for a notary to draw up a deed. The rest is space, and it has to be stood in and acted in; no pretty dodging among tea-tables and what-nots, no evasive fiddling with paper-knives and cigar-cases; every one must "take the floor" in the fullest sense, and make himself count for all that he should in the picture.'

¹

Je ne sais si ce trait se doit faire estimer,
Mais je sais bien qu'au moins je ne le puis blâmer.

Act iii, sc. 9.

² When she comes back from the ball, she has measured the empty conversation there by the kindness and worth of Ariste's words.

Et moi, je n'ai rien vu de plus insupportable,
Et je préférerais le plus simple entretien
A tous les contes bleus de ces diseurs de rien.
Ils croient que tout cède à leur perruque blonde,
Et pensent avoir dit le meilleur mot du monde

too, the *soubrette* of the piece, suggests the characters more firmly outlined in the later plays, though she is still called the *suivante*. Like Nicole, in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, Dorine in *Tartufe*, and Toinette in *Le Malade Imaginaire*, Lisette observes sharply, and translates her observations into speech which is very much to the point. She sees at once the contrast between Ariste and Sganarelle,

Bien vous prend que son frère ait toute une autre humeur,
Madame, . . .¹

and when Léonor in the same scene rebukes Sganarelle for his treatment of her sister, by showing how she would have resented it in her sister's place, Lisette breaks in and speaks for all women who are unfairly repressed and distrusted.²

It is Lisette who gives the key-note of the play here ; Lisette who, not being herself engaged in the plot, directs the reader's attention to the issues involved. The immediate effect of her words on the stage is to carry on the movement of the scene, by placing Ariste and Sganarelle in open opposition. Except for a word when she comes in as Léonor's *suivante* in Act iii, scene 8, Lisette only appears again in the last scene,³ where she is given the epilogue speech to the public :

Vous, si vous connaissez des maris loup-garous,
Envoyez-les au moins à l'école chez nous.⁴

Lorsqu'ils viennent, d'un ton de mauvais goguenard,
Vous railler sottement sur l'amour d'un vieillard ;
Et moi, d'un tel vieillard je prise plus le zèle
Que tous les beaux transports d'une jeune cervelle.

Act iii, sc. 8.

¹ Act i, sc. 2.

² Toutes ces gardes là sont visions de fous ;
Le plus sûr est, ma foi, de se fier en nous :
Qui nous gêne se met en un péril extrême,
Et toujours notre honneur veut se garder lui-même.
C'est nous inspirer presque un désir de pécher
Que montrer tant de soin de nous en empêcher,
Et si par un mari je me voyais contrainte,
J'aurais fort grande pente à confirmer sa crainte.

Act iii, sc. 9.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Just as in the earlier scene Lisette is the third party, and points the moral of the opposition between Ariste and Sganarelle, so in this last scene she implies the relation between the drama and life. The moral is to be taken to heart by the audience. From the shadowy *confidente*, the recipient of the heroine's feelings, Molière has developed the robust *soubrette*, whose strong sense marks out to the audience from the material before them the ground for a rational judgement.

Later on in the year 1661, which saw the production of *L'École des Maris*, Molière produced a sort of *comédie-ballet*, which he speaks of himself as a *mélange*, called *Les Fâcheux*. According to the records of the time, ballets were the mania of the moment, and Molière reflected contemporary taste, and risked contemporary criticism, when he produced the slight detached scenes of his comedy, and connected them with interludes which were spectacular. What strikes the reader particularly about this little play is the facility with which it is written, and also the hardihood with which the weakness and absurdities of contemporary society are translated into scenes for the stage. As La Fontaine said in his letter to Maucroix about Molière :

Jodelet n'est plus à la mode,
Et maintenant il ne faut pas
Quitter la nature d'un pas.

The realism of *Les Fâcheux* was made more real by the contrast with the ballets introduced into the piece and with the prologue. Thus a naiad coming out of a shell addresses the king and introduces the piece ; the ballets have perhaps more connexion with the idea of the play as *suisses* with their weapons appear at the end to drive away the *masques fâcheux*. In the ballet of the second act each *entrée* interrupts and drives out the others.¹

¹ ' . . . Tous les danseurs y représentoient des Fâcheux de plusieurs

L'École des Femmes succeeded *Les Fâcheux* in 1662. At the time it was Molière's greatest immediate success, but it also drew down upon him a mass of hostile criticism, to which he replied in *La Critique de l'École des Femmes* and later on in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*. Boileau showed what was the secret of the critics' attitude in his stanzas written in 1663 :

Laisse gronder tes envieux.
 Ils ont beau crier en tous lieux
 Qu'en vain tu charmes le vulgaire,
 Que tes vers n'ont rien de plaisant :
 Si tu savois un peu moins plaire,
 Tu ne leur déplairois pas tant.¹

L'École des Maris has shown Molière's art in its first vigour and independence ; *L'École des Femmes*, written round the same theme, shows a still greater advance. The farcical element remains : the very intrigue by which M. de la Souche and Arnolphe are wrongly distinguished into two persons is of the nature of elementary farce. The scenes with the valets, who, however, do not retain the 'masque' names, but are known by the realistic names of Alain and Georgette, are also farcical, and give relief to the more serious side of the comedy. For though at the time of its production the critics would not commit themselves further than to say with Loret that it was a

Pièce aucunement instructive
 Et tout à fait récréative,²

yet it was also a *pièce à thèse*, and the thesis was the conclusion of that in *L'École des Maris*. The husband in the earlier play, with his suspicions and his narrowness,

manières : en quoi, certes, ils ne parurent nullement fâcheux à notre égard . . .' (*Lettre de La Fontaine à Maucroix*).

¹ Cf. Molière, *Critique de l'École des Femmes*, sc. 6 : ' Enfin, monsieur, toute votre raison, c'est que *L'École des Femmes* a plu.'

² Lettre du 13 janvier.

forms women such as Agnès, whose guileless trickery check-mates the plans of man.¹ In Molière, as in Corneille, and as in the philosophers and educationists of the whole seventeenth century, we have the expression of a revolt against absolute authority, and especially against the tyranny of the head of a household over the freedom and development of the individual members. But the idea of freedom in the seventeenth century involved the perception of relations and the dutiful acting of his part by man in family and civic life. Hence the authority which Molière rejects is the extreme use of it, which makes it impossible for the next generation to take its place with able and reasoned judgement.

By strong use of irony Molière shows too that the simple woman of *L'École des Femmes*, if she is conceived of as reduced to her mere quality of woman in relation to man, has an elementary candour about her which inflicts considerable pain on Arnolphe. The simple life which Arnolphe prefers is one that is simple for himself, but causes complicated conditions for others. He would be satisfied with Agnès, but she would have to do violence to her nature to accept the position forced upon her. Hence she marks almost brutally the contrast between the elderly lover and Horace.

Agnès.

Mais, à vous parler franchement entre nous,
Il est plus pour cela selon mon goût que vous.
Chez vous le mariage est fâcheux et pénible
Et vos discours en font une image terrible ;
Mais, las ! il le fait, lui, si rempli de plaisirs,
Que de se marier il donne des désirs.

Arnolphe.

Ah ! c'est que vous l'aimez, traîtresse !

¹ See Rigal, *Molière*, t. i, p. 170.

Agnès.

Oui, je l'aime.

Arnolphe.

Et vous avez le front de le dire à moi-même !

Agnès.

Et pourquoi, s'il est vrai, ne le dirois-je pas ?¹

The freedom that it was Arnolphe's principle to deny to Agnès is now offered as a bribe to passion, but Agnès's instinct, strangely and suddenly awakened by love, is more responsive to Horace's words than to Arnolphe's elaborate phrases, and her own expression is characterized by a piercing simplicity.

Agnès.

Tenez, tous vos discours ne me touchent point l'âme :
Horace avec deux mots en feroit plus que vous.²

It has been said that *L'École des Femmes* recalls for us both Molière's old farcical habit and his reflection on life. The audience find amusement, but not a gaiety unmingled with thought. Molière has stated certain problems which deal with the relation of men and women, problems which the seventeenth century could not ignore, and are even yet unresolved.³

La Critique de l'École des Femmes, perhaps primarily a defence of Molière's play in the form of an attack on his critics, is not only a witness to the strength and point of Molière's resources, it also involves something like a theory of dramatic criticism. Molière's main point is that criticism should be rational in the sense of Boileau—native good judgement is irrespective of rank and opportunities.

¹ *L'École des Femmes*, act v, sc. 4.

² *Ibid.*

³ ' Dans ces œuvres (*L'École des Maris*, *L'École des Femmes*) l'ancien farceur se retrouve, mais le penseur se fait sa part ; le public rit, mais il réfléchit et a raison de le faire ' (Rigal, *Molière*, t. i, p. 182).

' . . . Le bon sens n'a point de place déterminée à la comédie . . . ' ¹ Direct contact with art without the interference of fixed rules or prejudices is the only condition of a wise and sound judgement, which brings about appreciation in the strict sense, rather than mere fault-finding. The desire to be original and peculiar accounts for many perverted views.

Molière's next important point is that the criticism of life produced in the drama should never be taken as personal, because in its nature it is generalized. ² But the kind of comedy to which the public would take exception, suspecting personal attacks, is, Molière sees, a comedy which has more lightness of touch and variety of characterization than the *pièces sérieuses* to which the general name of *comédie* had been applied. This new lighter comedy aims at correcting the defects of society by bringing them before the footlights rather than by establishing a precedent on the stage of ideal conditions, to which it is hoped real life may try to conform. The French love of beauty and order was here against Molière, but he aims at showing that a society which is hollow and cankered cannot produce a drama of ideal conditions. The true instinct of the artist in Molière leads him to reflect life, and his defence of realism is at the same time an attack on the society from which he drew his models. ³ It is easier, he says, to paint heroes than men, but it is not

¹ *La Critique de l'École des Femmes*, sc. 5.

² ' N'allons point nous appliquer nous-mêmes les traits d'une censure générale ; et profitons de la leçon, si nous pouvons, sans faire semblant qu'on parle à nous. Toutes les peintures ridicules qu'on expose sur les théâtres doivent être regardées sans chagrin de tout le monde. Ce sont miroirs publics, où il ne faut jamais témoigner qu'on se voie ; et c'est se taxer hautement d'un défaut que se scandaliser qu'on le reprenne ' (Ibid., sc. 6).

³ ' . . . Il y a une grande différence de toutes ces bagatelles à la beauté des pièces sérieuses ' (Ibid.).

the work of the artist to widen the difference between the ideal and the real ; rather to represent the real in a way which shall awaken amusement as well as reflection. So Dorante says :

‘ Car enfin, je trouve qu’il est bien plus aisé de se guinder sur de grands sentiments, de braver en vers la Fortune, accuser les Destins, et dire des injures aux Dieux, que d’entrer comme il faut dans le ridicule des hommes, et de rendre agréablement sur le théâtre les défauts de tout le monde. Lorsque vous peignez des héros, vous faites ce que vous voulez. Ce sont des portraits à plaisir, où l’on ne cherche point de ressemblance ; et vous n’avez qu’à suivre les traits d’une imagination qui se donne l’essor, et qui souvent laisse le vrai pour attraper le merveilleux. Mais lorsque vous peignez les hommes, il faut peindre d’après nature. On veut que ces portraits ressemblent ; et vous n’avez rien fait, si vous n’y faites reconnoître les gens de votre siècle. En un mot, dans les pièces sérieuses, il suffit, pour n’être point blâmé, de dire des choses qui sont de bon sens et bien écrites ; mais ce n’est pas assez dans les autres, il y faut plaisanter ; et c’est une étrange entreprise que celle de faire rire les honnêtes gens.’¹

Molière thus comes back to his original point, confidence in the good sense of the public. A play which is pleasing to his audience has obeyed the greatest of all dramatic laws.² Beside this great law the classical rules appear to be only the conventions of the hour. Having tasted your excellent sauce, says Molière, it is not worth while trying to discover whether it was made by the rules of the *Cuisinier Français*.³

The artifice by which Molière concludes the play, and shows up his characters in relief, is a clever counterpart to

¹ *La Critique de l’École des Femmes*, sc. 6.

² ‘ Je voudrais bien savoir si la grande règle de toutes les règles n’est pas de plaire, et si une pièce de théâtre qui a attrapé son but n’a pas suivi un bon chemin ’ (Ibid.).

³ Ibid. : ‘ C’est justement comme un homme qui auroit trouvé une sauce excellente, et qui voudroit examiner si elle est bonne sur les préceptes du *Cuisinier français*. ’

that of *L'Impromptu de Versailles*. In *La Critique de l'École des Femmes* the personages suggest that their conversation might work up into a play. 'Chevalier,' says Uranie, 'faites un mémoire de tout, et le donnez à Molière, que vous connaissez, pour le mettre en comédie.'¹ The slightly characterized actors gain body, as it were by the suggestion that they are a part of life, but might furnish material for a stage-play.

In *L'Impromptu de Versailles* the process is a different one. The troupe of actors, Molière at the head, are represented as rehearsing (under the usual stress of want of time) a little play commanded by the king. Here the characters on the boards are helped out by the names and the associations which the public had with these players.² By two such different methods has Molière given force and reality to the creatures of his imagination. *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, however, is much weaker and slighter in treatment than *La Critique de l'École des Femmes*, the *dénouement* is simply brought about by a message from the king, and Molière himself probably felt the weakness of the play, since he did not have it printed, as Voltaire noticed.³

Le Mariage Forcé, dating from 1664, was Molière's next experiment in light comedy. It is chiefly remarkable for the substratum of actual knowledge of the Aristotelian method of logic and of the Pyrrhonian treatment of fact. It was followed in the same year by *La Princesse d'Élide*,⁴ a comedy borrowed from Spanish sources, dressed in Greek fashion, relieved by interludes of native farce in the scenes with Moron, the court fool, and enlivened by an unusual

¹ *La Critique de l'École des Femmes*, sc. 6.

² A similar artifice is used by Rostand in *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

³ 'Molière sentit d'ailleurs la faiblesse de cette petite comédie, et ne la fit point imprimer' (*Sommaire de l'Impromptu de Versailles*, par Voltaire).

⁴ Moreto's *El desden con el desden*.

opening—Lyciscas is aroused from sleep by an *entrée* of the ballet of musicians and others. The haste with which Molière had worked is shown by the alternation of verse and prose, verse entirely ceases after the first scene of the second act, thus showing that Molière had only ‘improved’ the early part of his comedy.

Only four days after the appearance of this *comédie-ballet* the first three acts of *Tartufe* were given to the public, and on February 15, 1665, *Don Juan ou le Festin de Pierre* was played at the Palais-Royal.

Molière’s relation to the critics of his time, whether *littérateurs* or men in society, can be further illustrated from these two plays. In fact there is a double interest in them. Molière is attacking his critics in a new direction, and at the same time is creating in *Tartufe* a *genre* of comedy which includes all the elements found in the earlier plays, and yet is also a comedy-of-character in which one type of human nature is set in peculiarly high relief.¹ Molière’s skill in combining the elements is remarkably happy, though he is here, as elsewhere, sometimes impatient with his own art, and calls in the king as *deus ex machina*.

It is worthy of notice that while in some other plays, e.g. *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and *George Dandin*, the central character is the dupe, in *Tartufe* the balance is shifted, and the interest is focused on the impostor. The mere fact that *Tartufe* does not appear till the third act, heightens instead of lessening the dramatic intensity; for he is the object to which the thought of every character in the play has turned willingly or unwillingly throughout the early acts. In fact the characters become unconsciously subject to a classification in the minds of the audience.

¹ See Rigal, *Molière*, t. i, p. 249: ‘Dans la comédie de caractère de Molière il y a fondus intimement: le caractère d’abord, puis la pièce à thèse ou à idées, la comédie de mœurs, la comédie d’intrigue et la farce.’

What is the relation to *Tartufe*? is the question. *Tartufe* divides opinion sharply. When he appears, the reader has to conciliate the impression given of him in advance with that produced by the man himself; it is not difficult, for Molière has skilfully used comic relief to introduce freshness of perception, while the acts of *Tartufe* are in logical relation to what he has done before. The consequences of those acts have put *Tartufe* into positions in which it is increasingly difficult for him to keep up his rôle of *dévo*t. Hence the comic element in the play. Sometimes the two sides of his character almost seem to be dislocated, as in the scenes with Elmire,¹ which bring about the crisis at the end of the fourth act.

In proportion as the vision of the reader is clearer as to the abominable hypocrisy of *Tartufe*, so much the more comic becomes his dupe and foil Orgon. Each subtle victory of *Tartufe*, as in the case of the *donation* makes the gullibility of Orgon plainer:² and the play gains its tense interest not merely from the conflict of inclinations in *Tartufe*, but from the almost reckless way in which the action swerves and plunges from farce to tragedy and back again. It is a breathless struggle of emotions.

As a criticism of his critics, what has Molière to offer us in *Tartufe* and in *Don Juan*? The two plays are connected in time of presentation, and in the treatment of the subject of hypocrisy. Molière's doctrine of realism, which he defended at all points, included a claim to represent on the stage a vice which his detractors said was a secret vice, and therefore could not be exhibited in art.³ Any vice which existed in life could, Molière claimed, be presented

¹ *Tartufe*, act iv, sc. 5.

² *Ibid.*, sc. 8.

³ e.g. La Bruyère, in this criticism, which was finally put into shape in the portrait of Onuphre in the chapter *de la mode* (1691).

on the stage, which was therefore a help to public morality by exciting laughter.

‘Sire, le devoir de la comédie étant de corriger les hommes en les divertissant, j’ai cru que, dans l’emploi où je me trouve, je n’avois rien de mieux à faire que d’attaquer par des peintures ridicules les vices de mon siècle ; et comme l’hypocrisie sans doute en est un des plus en usage, des plus incommodes et des plus dangereux, j’avois eu, Sire, la pensée que je ne rendrois pas un petit service à tous les honnêtes gens de votre royaume, si je faisois une comédie qui décriât les hypocrites et mît en vue comme il faut toutes les grimaces étudiées de ces gens de bien à outrance, toutes les friponneries couvertes de ces faux-monnayeurs en dévotion, qui veulent attraper les hommes avec un zèle contrefait et une charité sophistique.’¹

Molière’s preface to the play shows clearly that in doing this he had been urged on by the knowledge of special cases of hypocrisy and enmity. He had been freely accused of want of delicacy and respect for religion in his play, *L’École des Femmes*. Following his usual method of attacking his critics, he tried to show that those who had cried out upon those blemishes were themselves more than culpable. Some critics find a definite allusion here to the Congrégation du Saint Sacrement, which had constituted itself a censor of public morals, and led a cabal against Molière.² That the play of *Don Juan*, bitter, ironic, and over-hastily constructed as it is, sprang from a similar source, a wish to throw scorn on the motive of an enemy, is also probable. Don Juan’s tirade³ against the prevalent hypocrisy of tone is shown by a modern critic to be connected with the speeches of Cléante in *Tartufe*,⁴ and with the *placets* and *préface* printed in our editions of this play. It is therefore not surprising that *Don Juan*, in its turn, aroused recrimina-

¹ *Premier placet présenté au roy sur la comédie du Tartufe*. See also the Préface.

² See Rigal, *Molière*, t. i, pp. 232-5.

³ *Don Juan*, act v, sc. 2.

⁴ *Tartufe*, act i, sc. 5.

tions. Both plays were forbidden, though *Tartufe* was acted by invitation at the great houses, such as that of Chantilly; and it is noticeable that Molière's genius never quite recovered the shock of the struggle and disillusionment. He allowed *Don Juan* to drop out of sight—and he seems to have renounced in his later plays an uneven struggle with a corrupt public opinion. He abandons for the most part the direct and fierce attack on evil, and gives the French world of the seventeenth century what in the later years of Louis XIV's reign it could accept: a thoroughly artistic reflection of the more superficial foibles of a society that was dominated by the influence of Louis XIV in person.¹

¹ The great rulers Richelieu and Mazarin had both been patrons of literature, but Richelieu's influence, which exerted a strong stimulus, ended in 1643, and Mazarin's with his death in 1661. Mazarin, who had pensioned Descartes and had introduced the Italian opera into Paris, had helped to widen the scope of French art, but when Louis XIV took the reins of government into his own hands he appointed ministers who controlled certain departments, and Colbert, though not of the first three, very soon assumed the chief responsibility for finance in Fouquet's place. His chief interest was given to the encouragement of French arts and industries of the order of luxury—tapestries and silks and mosaics and cloth of gold—and by a system of protection and bounties gave a definite direction to this development. The royal resources were used too for expressing in great palaces, such as the newly constructed Château de Versailles (1661) and the Louvre (the new colonnade of which was added in 1665), the gorgeousness and artificial brilliance of the royalty of the period. It is true that Colbert also founded academies—those of inscriptions, 1663, sciences, 1666, and architecture, 1671—and built the Observatory, but all these institutions again were royal ones, and served to increase the prestige of the king. Under these circumstances a double change took place in the tendency of literature. It became dissociated from the court and society, and therefore critical of it, while it lost some of the quality of fire and spontaneity that had marked the early period of Corneille (up to 1646), and of Molière up to 1664 (though Molière's later plays are still masterpieces of art). The greater prevalence of the Cartesian idea increased the tendency to criticism. La Bruyère and Boileau, among others, represent the critical attitude of literature towards contemporary life and art, which was increased by the fact that they as well as Molière were of *bourgeois* origin, and had no hereditary prepossession for the more

We shall, then, expect to find a somewhat different character in Molière's work after 1664. He makes quite a fresh and even disconcerting return to actual farce from time to time, as in the framework and intention of the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, *Le Médecin malgré lui*, *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, and *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. He makes experiments in *comédies-ballets*, which are more and more suited to the taste of his time, and shows in the subject of *Mélicerte* (described as a *comédie-pastorale-héroïque*) that the ancient pastoral now formed the libretto of the operatic ballet. Of the same character are *Le Sicilien* and *Psyché* (arranged in collaboration with Corneille and Quinault), while in *Amphitryon* Molière chose a classical subject, and here his adulation of the king masked the subtle irony of the piece. Of the more serious efforts, *George Dandin* is a play which, from Molière's own point of view, must have ended in unrelieved gloom, as the victory is with the base and artificial stratum of society which takes advantage of the honest *bourgeois*. *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* is painfully duped, so is the lover of the *Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*. Of the remaining plays, *L'Avare* is marked out by its form (it is one of the plays written in prose) as belonging to the series that lean to farce rather than to high comedy; and it must be remembered that in Molière's time it was a hazardous experiment, only rarely attempted, to use familiar prose on the stage.¹

artificial elements in the circles at the court. The strictness of the Jansenist morals, too, had produced a sense of contrast. Racine's work falls altogether in this later period, and its genius and artistic value are beyond dispute, but in its relation to the development of French life it must be said to be more critical than constructive, as the force of the moral idea characteristic of the seventeenth century in France is chiefly implied in a negative way by the corruption that results from its failure.

¹ As early as 1576 Louis le Jars had written a comedy, *Lucelle*, in prose, explaining that prose helps the realism of drama. See Sidney Lee, *The French Renaissance in England*, pp. 4, 8, 9, 411, 412, where Larivey's use of prose is commented on: 'Molière may be regarded as one of Larivey's

Even the old French farce was in rhymed verse, and it would seem that the simpler the conditions of the stage the more the sixteenth and seventeenth century author aimed at giving dignity to his style by fitting the words to rhyme and metre.¹ But as the complexity of the stage increased, and scenery and costumes contributed to give the necessary artistic remoteness to the action, prose became a more possible medium, at any rate for comedy. Thus, except for the early farces, which are merely sketched out, prose is freely used in a good many of Molière's plays. *Les Femmes Savantes* is the only serious exception.

L'Avare is marked out too as leaning to farce by the title, which at once suggests a type rather than the characterization of an individual. *Le Menteur*, *Les Plaideurs*, as well as *L'Étourdi*, *L'Avare*, are titles which are intended to prepare the audience for the kind of play to be presented to them. Molière, however, more than fulfils his promise. He shows us a picture of vice in which every line is clear and every circumstance illuminative, and he also suggests the conflict in the mind of the miser between his strongest trait and another more subtle temptation—the attraction of Mariane. This is the centre of interest in a play which is somewhat loosely woven together in plot, but in which Molière's knowledge of his audience and ear for the effect of certain combinations of ideas upon the stage has produced as usual an artistic whole.

Les Femmes Savantes is an appeal to the social fact in human life. Molière, who could rail at the absurdities of the *Précieuse* 'pour rire', deals with them in the later comedy in their ordinary human domestic relations; the failure of

disciples, and from him Larivey's application of prose to French comedy received its final sanction.'

¹ It has often been noticed that a great deal of Molière's own prose is metrical, as in *Le Sicilien*.

the *Précieuse* is the basis of Molière's criticism. It is not the learning of the *Précieuse* that is at fault, but her attitude to the experience of life which is the result of her vanity. On the other hand, Molière does not exalt the simplicity of an Agnès of *L'École des Maris*, but he appeals to the practical wisdom of the sweet-natured Henriette, whose straightness in accepting facts is after all in part the result of her being in contact with different dispositions and of having formed the habit of thought. Only instead of keeping her thought for abstract ideas, she applies it to life.

Le Malade Imaginaire, under the form of farce, presents other serious problems. The one suggested by the title is the least serious and the most farcical in the play. But Molière has realized in his presentation of Argan's character that the fear of death and constant search after health constitute a type of mental illness that is clearly marked out from physical disease. Toinette, who, as the *soubrette*, marks the common-sense view in the piece, expresses this. The key to the play is, however, not the fact of Argan's nervous weakness, but the self-deception which is at the root of it, and which brings with it the deceit of others. There is a whole network of deceit in the play. Angélique's engagement is brought about by a ruse, Argan's credulousness in the matter of his wife Bélise can only be cured by Toinette's ingenious device. Louison is trained in ways of deceit. Under the cover of robust farce Molière is again tilting at the evils of a society which does not fulfil its natural obligations of sincerity and kindness.

Le Misanthrope, one of the most self-revealing of Molière's plays, is more full of bitter criticism of this kind than almost any other, though not his latest effort. As representing a definite stage in Molière's development, and at the same time completing the study of Molière's criticism of life which has been traced through *L'École des Maris* and

L'École des Femmes and *Tartufe*, *Le Misanthrope* calls for more detailed study.

What is there in *Le Misanthrope* that at once brings to mind the modern epoch of the drama? It is partly, perhaps, the setting. As in the case of the action in Ibsen's domestic dramas, that of Molière's play is confined to a room, which is the theatre of passions formerly represented on the open piazza, or on a stage imitated in its spacious width from that of the morality play. The actors, too, are figures taken from contemporary society. There is practically no caricature in the play. The farcical element had been used by Molière to throw up by contrast the reality of the other characters in his other plays. This is not necessary in *Le Misanthrope*—the painting from life is so delicate and clear, the movement of thought and emotion so evident, though restrained. Of action there is little, of intrigue practically none. But *Le Misanthrope* is *par excellence* the comedy of manners. Because of this it has a lasting interest of its own. Thoughts and emotions, as Racine would say a few years later in his preface to *Iphigénie*, arouse the same interest in Paris as in ancient Athens. What is characteristic of humanity in general will always move the audience at a drama.¹ In *Le Misanthrope*, Alceste's heart and his reason are seen in conflict, and this gives the material for a moving play. The conflict is increased through Alceste's natural disposition, which despises the ordinary traffic of politeness, while by his sincerity he shows up the hollowness of the society which surrounds him. No caricature of Molière's has been half so effective as this placing against the background of a social order that is highly nervous and artificial, the solitary man sincere and uncompromising, who wounds the sensibilities of others,

¹ Préface, *Iphigénie*: '... Mes spectateurs ont été émus des mêmes choses qui ont mis autrefois en larmes le plus savant peuple de la Grèce...'

but is bound to suffer in return both in his pride and in his happiness. As the play moves on, the more Alceste is injured by the conflicts he brings about, the more he desires love and idealizes it in Célimène ; but in vain, for after his momentary defection and attention to Éliante, when he returns to Célimène, it is to find that her love is not equal to sharing his solitude in the desert that his nature has spread around him. The *Misanthrope* of Molière is not the man and woman hater, but the disillusioned idealist. He is really the hero of Corneille obliged to express himself in the highly artificial conditions of court and society life at the end of the reign of Louis XIV ; he is in contact with too complex a life, and the process is an uneasy one.¹ But in his search for simplicity and reality Alceste not only recalls Corneille's heroes, but prefigures the ideal of the modern world. We have lost the outward conditions of the reign of Louis XIV, and though we can by no means claim to have outlived the artificiality and hypocrisy of that time, the ideal of the modern world since the Revolution has pointed in the direction of simplicity of action and of social relations. Hence, perhaps, the present importance of this play of Molière's. His Alceste expresses the necessity for revolt against conditions that are bound to cramp the progress of society. The failure of Alceste no doubt reflects Molière's own sense of rebuff and of misunderstanding. For the artist has the necessity of seeing his own time clearly and reporting it courageously. Whether he reflects the better elements only, or puts them in relief by reflecting the baser ones, he is conscious of both, and of the struggle between them. In this we find one reason for the tragic quality of the piece. Its pathetic quality is due to something else. If we analyse the emotions which a moving

¹ Voilà la bonne foi, le zèle vertueux,
 La justice et l'honneur que l'on trouve chez eux !
Le Misanthrope, act v, sc. 1.

play excites in us, we may discover, as Aristotle did, that where tragedy predominates pity and terror are the effects. If the strong perception of the trend of the conflict can awaken terror, it is surely the intimate knowledge of the way the characters regard their own fate that arouses pity. The pathetic in drama depends almost wholly on the consciousness of the actors of the tragic quality in their fate.¹ Ophelia's songs utter this consciousness, though disjointed and almost dissociated from the original experience. Lear and Hamlet pity themselves; Julius Caesar, Coriolanus, Lady Macbeth, do not, and the pathetic quality is absent from the impression they produce. There is, however, another aspect of the idea of pathos which was prominent in the case of a Greek play and is less so on the French stage. The Greek audience at a tragedy felt the pathos in the case of the unconscious victims of a Nemesis, in the action of which the chorus had instructed them. The audience was in the counsels of the gods. But the Christian tragedy of Corneille is entirely without this appeal to pathos. His heroes are strongly supported by the sense of the invisible world, and Polyeucte marches to the pyre as to a royal victory. Shakespeare's heroes in the historical plays sometimes arouse the same sense of the pathetic in us as a Greek play, because we know the fate that is hanging over them. Racine's Phèdre is pathetic in both senses: she is the plaything of fate, and also she is fully conscious of the tragic pitifulness of her suffering and sin.

In all Molière's comedies the one case in which a sense of pathos is evoked is that of *Le Misanthrope*. Alceste deserved better of his world, and knew it. Therefore his suffering, and his conscious interest in his own case, arouse pathetic interest in the audience. The play represents at once Molière's strongest criticism and greatest height of dramatic characterization.

¹ Except in the case of children, or the weak and oppressed. See, e.g., Shakespeare's treatment of the children of Lady Macduff.

CHAPTER VII

THE COMEDY OF MOLIÈRE

IN the comparative study of Corneille and Racine we see that the tragic drama of the first great author deals with the will in conscious action, and that of the second with the disintegration of the will, and thus with human life in prey to the unrestrained forces of nature. It will be observed that the two series of dramas taken together cover the same field as that of the Aeschylean trilogy, where the self-determination of the will is studied side by side with the moral and physical consequences of sin. The greatness of the Aeschylean trilogy lies in its presentation of the two aspects. In the Christian drama of Corneille the greatness may be said to lie in the contrast of the tragic event and the moral victory; the author makes us feel that the victory prevails. Freedom, in its seventeenth-century dramatic significance, is associated not only with this creative action of the will, but with the belief in the final victory of good over evil.¹ It is averse from the idea of classification, and from the working out of determined physical laws. So long,

¹ See Descartes' *Méditation Quatrième*, p. 100, ed. Charpentier: 'Car, afin que je sois libre, il n'est pas nécessaire que je sois indifférent à choisir l'un ou l'autre des deux contraires; mais plutôt, d'autant plus que je penche vers l'un, soit que je connaisse évidemment que le bien et le vrai s'y rencontrent, soit que Dieu dispose ainsi l'intérieur de ma pensée, d'autant plus librement j'en fais choix et je l'embrasse; et certes, la grâce divine et la connaissance naturelle, bien loin de diminuer ma liberté, l'augmentent plutôt et la fortifient, de façon que cette indifférence que je sens lorsque je ne suis point emporté vers un côté plutôt que vers un autre par le poids d'aucune raison, est le plus bas degré de la liberté, et fait plutôt paraître un défaut dans la connaissance.'

then, as the ideal of freedom, expressed by Corneille among dramatists, prevailed in the public mind, neither Racinian tragedy nor the farcical comedy would quite answer expectation; while high or heroic comedy would be more readily conceived of as in line with the teaching of Corneille. Corneille, whose tragedy illustrates the will in free action, recoils even in *Le Menteur* from the picture of mechanical habit which is the mark of farce; Racine, on the other hand, gives us in his one comedy, *Les Plaideurs*, a version of a Latin farcical comedy in which the mechanical restriction of habit in the characters is very apparent, and in which the play runs along familiar lines.¹ The idealism of Corneille and the realism of Racine are here fully contrasted, for the former deals with the supreme possibilities of human nature, and the latter with its habitual workings. In Racine the unchecked tragedy of passion is as far removed from the free conscious creative act in the minds of his characters as is the thoughtless bustle of farce; both forms of art lie apart from the real *nexus* of life.

In Corneille both high comedy and the drama of endeavour (to which it is difficult sometimes to apply the name of tragedy), lie closer to what is vital and progressive.² For the action in plain farce may reproduce what we most constantly see before us; it gives us snapshots of people taken

¹ Racine himself explains in the preface to *Les Plaideurs* that the *plaisanteries* were suitable to Italian actors—in other words, to the comedy of masks. ‘Le juge qui saute par les fenêtres, le chien criminel, et les larmes de sa famille, me semblaient autant d’incidents dignes de la dignité de Scaramouche.’

² ‘Plus un drame a de grandeur, plus profonde est l’élaboration à laquelle le poète a dû soumettre la réalité pour en dégager le tragique à l’état pur. Au contraire, c’est dans ses formes inférieures seulement, c’est dans le vaudeville et la farce, que la comédie tranche sur le réel: plus elle s’élève plus elle tend à se confondre avec la vie, et il y a des scènes de la vie réelle qui sont si voisines de la haute comédie que le théâtre pourrait les approprier sans y changer un mot’ (Bergson, *Le Rire*, p. 139).

unawares, and often expresses their lack of living purpose : while in high comedy we have an attempt to paint character—the portraiture of individuals as well as that of types,¹ and the picture of free conscious acts rather than of habits.² It has been noticed indeed by many critics that the characters of farce are the creatures of the plot, while those of comedy control it.

Is it possible to define the exact relation of comedy to farce ?

A description of the comic drama, which claims to include both, is generally misleading. Such, for instance, is that of a comedy as a play which provokes laughter, which is more applicable to the Greek than to the modern stage. Meredith, having in mind a comedy which is not pure farce, says ‘ the test of a true comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter.’³ Now, laughter can be aroused in many ways short of what Meredith calls true comedy. When habit is seen to overcome conscious thought, as in the case of the absent-minded ; or when an old habit of thought or fixed idea prevents some one from responding easily to the life around him, or being sensitive to new ideas ;⁴ or again, when one type of habit prevails over another which is more suitable to the circumstances,⁵ laughter is excited.

In the same way the audience in the secret of the plot of, for example, the *Comedy of Errors*, can find great amusement in the beating of the Dromios, for the facts which explain the riddle are successively presented to the audience,

¹ ‘ Tout personnage comique est un *type*. Inversement, toute ressemblance à un type a quelque chose de comique ’ (Bergson, *Le Rire*, p. 52).

² ‘ . . . Il n’y a d’essentiellement risible que ce qui est automatiquement accompli ’ (Ibid., p. 149).

³ Meredith, *The Idea of Comedy*, p. 88.

⁴ This is the material for the laughable scenes in *Tartufe*, *Le Malade Imaginaire*, and *L’Avare*.

⁵ As in the action of the valets in *L’Étourdi*, *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, &c.

while the masters of the slaves are guided by habit and impulse, and do not disentangle the threads of the action. In cases like this the superior knowledge of the onlooker gives intensity to the laughable situation, but it is still hardly 'thoughtful laughter' that is aroused.

At what point, then, does comedy emerge from the quality of farce? Not apparently through the contrast between life in the audience and farce on the stage, but where the farce on the stage is shown to us to be farce through the action of the other characters. Orgon's 'Le pauvre homme' is in contrast with Dorine's shrewd humour. She is thoroughly vivid and full of life, while Orgon is obsessed by a fixed idea. Harpagon's devotion to his money-box is in contrast with Anselme's desire for the happiness of the lovers.¹ Toinette's clear sight is justified in the comic scenes of Argan's pretended death.² Here in every case there is a contrast *within the play*, between mechanism and reality. True comedy is marked by this expectation of life and conscious purpose; the inclusion of farcical elements helps to bring out the contrast. This is perhaps why, though it is possible to write a play which is undiluted farce, high comedy with no element of farce is rare; farce occurs frequently in high or heroic comedy. It is to be found in the poetic drama of Shakespeare, e.g. in *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*; in Corneille in *Le Menteur* and in *L'Illusion Comique*. Farce occurs, too, in Molière's attempts at romantic comedy, e.g. in *Don Juan* and in *Don Garcie de Navarre*. One of Molière's early plays, *L'Étourdi*, has so much conventional classification both of character and of intrigue that it is only saved from dreariness by two passages which mark the relation of the farce to life. Lélie, in Act iii, is stung into real feeling by the enormity of the accusation delivered

¹ *L'Avare*, act v, sc. 6.

² *Le Malade Imaginaire*, act iii, scs. 12, 13, 14.

against Célie as part of the intrigue for Lélie's own advantage set going by Mascarille.

Non, non, point de clin d'œil, et point de raillerie,
Je suis aveugle à tout, sourd à quoi que ce soit ;
Fût-ce mon propre frère, il me la payeroit ;
Et sur ce que j'adore oser porter le blâme,
C'est me faire une plaie au plus tendre de l'âme.¹

Again, Mascarille himself describes his efforts to serve Lélie in a poetical analogy which has the heat of real feeling :

Pour moi, j'en ai souffert la gêne sur mon corps ;
Malgré le froid, je sue encore de mes efforts ;
Attaché dessus vous comme un joueur de boule
Après le mouvement de la sienne qui roule,
Je pensais retenir toutes vos actions
En faisant de mon corps mille contorsions.²

So the new French comedy of the seventeenth century aims at giving a picture of the real life which farce has caricatured, but it retains and includes many farcical elements—such, for instance, as the attack on the class of doctors in Molière, on the class of lawyers in Racine's *Les Plaideurs*. *L'Étourdi* and *Le menteur* are both farcical characters. The subtle and free fusion of farce and comedy which characterizes the great mass of Molière's work is a development from the type of comedy which Corneille produced in *Le Menteur* (1643–4), and to which Molière expressly avowed his obligation. *Le Menteur* effects a transition between the comedy of situation and the comedy of character. Dorante the boaster is a creation, and it is his character which controls the plot ; and in Corneille's rendering of the play, changes the colour of Alarcon's conventional end.³

Molière's early attempts were almost entirely farcical,

¹ *L'Étourdi*, act iii, sc. 4.

² *Ibid.*, act iv, sc. 4.

³ *Examen du Menteur*.

but he also, in *Don Garcie de Navarre*, attempted heroic comedy of the same order as Corneille's. The remarkable play of *Don Juan*, which is partly extravaganza, partly satire, is hardly to be classified, and stands alone. But, like Molière's other plays, it has a strong admixture of farce. Molière's genius is chiefly shown in the long series of comedies (in all of which there is some element of farce),¹ in which he has first marked out certain types and then blended and fused them with individual characteristics till he gets to the height of his power of personal characterization in *Le Misanthrope*.

What becomes evident in an examination of seventeenth-century drama is that the French dramatist, whether working with the elements of tragic situation or relating farce to life, exercised a vital and conscious art. He did not habitually multiply the same ideas, but developed them, and perpetually recovered inspiration from the observation of contemporary life. Thus we find the French society of the period reflected with intense and luminous force in Corneille's, Molière's, and Racine's drama. The *précieuses* are faithfully portrayed—their literature and their refinement of language in Corneille's early comedies,² the absurdities of the cult which spread through imitation of their peculiarities in Molière's *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, the more serious criticism in *Les Femmes Savantes*. The court gallant appears frequently, and more than once comes upon the sharp edge of Molière's satire, as in *Don Juan*. The Church and the monarchy are not spared, as *Tartufe* and *Amphitryon* bear witness. Thus French comedy was steadily producing on the stage some reflection of life, sometimes satirized and distorted, but more often a clear and

¹ Even in experiments of quite a different nature, such as *Le Sicilien*, a kind of opera-ballet, and in *Amphitryon*, there are scenes of pure farce; witness Mercury's scene with Sosie, in the latter play.

² *Clitandre* and others.

enlightening one which was fair to all sides of society, and only abhorred pretentiousness and untruth. It was, of course, likely that the action and presentation of events in these comedies should be sometimes disconnected and unexpected, as they appear to be to an observer of life; but where that occurs, e.g. in *Don Juan*, there is the same kind of connecting thread that makes the unity of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*: the coherence is given by the conception of the central character; the construction is more like that of a novel than a play.

Thus as comedy is removed from farce by expressing conscious life as well as habit, the art of the dramatist in the comedy of character is also conscious, and the characters are not so easily classified. But has comedy of this type a conscious *purpose* too? Certainly nothing is further from the French notion of comedy than that of childish, irresponsible laughter, pantomime or pure play. The French are now and always have been, unaffected by the view expressed by many German critics (e.g. Schlegel), that comedy must in this way offer a complete contrast with tragedy. So far as a moral purpose is inherent in the true picture of life, French comedy and tragedy each bear witness to it. Thus it is that the French find a difficulty in accepting as comedy the poetic and romantic fancy of Shakespeare.¹ One critic indeed affirms that of the Shakespearean comedies only one, *The Taming of the Shrew*, corresponds at all truly to the French notion of comedy, as it is the only one of Shakespeare's in which the background is not fantastic.² The fact is that the Shakespearean

¹ See Stapfer, *Molière et Shakspeare*, p. 12: 'Nous touchons ici à une distinction extrêmement importante: celle des comédies ou prétendues comédies de Shakspeare et de son génie comique en général . . .' &c., et *passim*.

² 'Une pièce de son théâtre répond assez à l'idée que nous nous faisons en France de la comédie; c'est *La Méchante Femme mise à la raison*. Ici

comedy, though including elements in common with that of the seventeenth-century French drama, and thus sometimes coinciding with it, has had a different ancestry and evolution. For in France the development of high comedy and tragedy has seemed to be closely connected with the distinction of *genres*. When Corneille disentangled the tragic element from the dramatic material at hand, this elimination of tragedy encouraged by contrast the erection of pure comedy into an art, and the artist, in Molière, was at hand. Tragedy in England, as represented by Shakespeare and his predecessors, had found room for the comic spirit, and also for a realism of treatment that was absent from the Cornelian setting. The impulse aroused in English art was then not directed, as in France, towards a realistic comedy, which should compensate for abstract and ideal tragic types, but towards a comedy removed by its setting from the common light of day, and belonging—however truly human the characters—to the upper air of romance.¹

This contrast brings out more strongly our contention that the French attempt to be true to life in the drama had led to a serious treatment in comedy; to a psychological method, and to a moral end which is inherent in the painting of reality.

l'élément fantastique est nul; l'action, pleine de verve et de gaieté naturelle, se développe raisonnablement et logiquement, et une idée morale d'une clarté parfaite s'en dégage à la fin (Stapfer, *Molière et Shakespeare*, p. 10).

¹ 'En France, la tragédie et la comédie se sont rigoureusement séparées, celle-là vivant dans un monde idéal, celle-ci dans le monde réel: voilà pourquoi dans notre théâtre la comédie se détache avec un relief d'une incomparable netteté; mais ailleurs les choses se sont passées tout autrement. Les deux Muses ne craignaient pas de faire ménage ensemble, et il y avait déjà tant de réalisme comique dans les œuvres de la tragédie, que, lorsqu'il a plu à la comédie d'habiter un domaine à part, elle a dû se construire dans les airs un palais de fantaisie' (Ibid., p. 12).

‘Ce qui nous intéresse enfin, c’est d’entendre répéter, fût-ce pour la millièrne fois, que Molière seul a surpris le comique au sein de la nature, qu’il n’a pas cherché à dire de bons mots, à faire briller son imagination ou son esprit, mais à peindre le cœur humain et à être vrai, qu’en un mot son comique est un comique moral.’¹

Molière’s comedy is a comedy of actuality, of men and things as they are.² Thus we find in it not only a strict logic of event (which in the case of *Tartufe*, for example, had to be subsidized by a royal interference in order to produce a conventional close to the play),³ but we find in connexion with it a moral lesson which grows out of the conditions of the drama.⁴

French literary critics and philosophers agree that the French sense of comedy always involves a moral as well as a rational judgement.⁵ We may, perhaps, here admit a suggestion that the French in their drama have reached a possibility which may lie in the future for races which have not had their long literary ancestry,⁶ viz. the possibility of being at the same time artistic and rational. There is little effervescence of pure fun in French seventeenth-century

¹ Stapfer, *Molière et Shakspeare*, pp. 111, 112.

² ‘... C’est à dire qu’il nous fait l’effet d’être non dans l’esprit du poète, mais dans les choses et dans les hommes ; il n’y a pas moyen de qualifier d’un mot plus juste ni de mieux louer son génie, et là est le secret de sa supériorité sur tous les autres poètes comiques’ (Stapfer, *Molière et Shakspeare*, p. 159).

³ *Tartufe*, act v. The habit of the *faux dévot* to mask selfishness with an aspect of righteousness would otherwise have been successful in reducing the honest characters to misery.

⁴ Stapfer, *Molière et Shakspeare*, p. 64 : ‘Rien de moins léger, rien de plus grave au fond que la littérature française.’

⁵ See *Ibid.*, p. 66 : ‘Leur rire est toujours un jugement’ ; and Bergson, *Le Rire*, *passim*.

⁶ See Sidney Lee, *The French Renaissance in England*, pp. 7, 12, 41, 418, *et passim*. In the domain of the lyric France was nearly two centuries in advance of England, and in that of the drama the first steps towards a national classical tragedy were taken a century and a half before Shake-

literature ; the touches of poetic fancy are not rapid and frequent as in Shakespeare, but dramatic force is correlated with a beauty of diction, which gives an impression of a wholly fitting form in which the thought is expressed. Within the limits set, the art produced by the French in the seventeenth century was very great of its kind.

To inquire how far Molière fulfilled the French ideal is to somewhat strain the order of events. Most French critics of the eighteenth-century drama compare their authors to Molière, and it is clear that the great seventeenth-century dramatist has set the scale by which later dramatic writers are measured.

• speare, See, in the same book, the chapters on 'French Influence on Elizabethan Drama', pp. 359-454, and the appendix (p. 455), to the chapters on the 'French Influence on the Elizabethan Lyric', pp. 183-276, showing the 'Elizabethan method of direct and unavowed transference from French poetry of the Pleiade School'.

CHAPTER VIII

RACINE AND THE GREEK DRAMA

ALFRED DE VIGNY, writing in 1829, said of the seventeenth-century drama :

‘ Dans le système dramatique qui vient de s’éteindre, toute tragédie était une catastrophe et un dénouement d’une action déjà mûre au lever du rideau, qui ne tenait plus qu’à un fil et n’avait plus qu’à tomber.’

This generalization is not true in the same sense of the dramatic action in both Corneille and Racine. Corneille’s heroes have no psychological past : Racine’s characters are not the inheritors of a tragedy that is all but spent. Each lives a complete life, whether of purpose or emotion, upon the stage. Yet it is true that the inner necessity in Corneille’s plays, and the outer necessity in Racine’s, carry on the tragedy in each case to what is, psychologically speaking, a foregone conclusion. Both writers aim at giving a complete action and solid termination to their plays. Neither would have admitted the function of the drama which is involved in the idea of the problem play. ‘ Pour moi,’ says Racine, ‘ j’ai toujours compris que la tragédie étant l’imitation d’une action complète, où plusieurs personnes concourent, cette action n’est point finie que l’on sache en quelle situation elle laisse ces mêmes personnes.’¹ Even where, as in *Britannicus*, Racine had intended to give the picture of a *monstre naissant*,² this is still complete in idea ; the note of horror and premonition is sounded by Burrhus’ last words :

Plût aux dieux que ce fût le dernier de ses crimes.³

¹ Première Préface, *Britannicus*, p. 239.

² Ibid., p. 237.

³ *Britannicus*, act v, sc. 8.

In the preface to *Bérénice* (1670), which practically contains all Racine's presuppositions as to the nature and significance of drama and its form, he marks his agreement with the theory that the aim of dramatic art is to give pleasure, and he builds up a connexion between the pleasurable effect of tragedy and the shortness and simplicity of the action. He chooses his subject for the sake of the violent emotional crisis it contained.

‘ Cette action est très fameuse dans l’histoire : et je l’ai trouvée très propre pour le théâtre, par la violence des passions qu’elle y pouvait exciter.’¹

A tragedy, he says, can do without actual carnage on the stage, but the cause of the pleasure of a tragedy to the audience lies in its presentation of majestic grief.

‘ Ce n’est point une nécessité qu’il y ait du sang et des morts dans une tragédie : il suffit que l’action en soit grande, que les acteurs en soient héroïques, que les passions y soient excitées, et que tout s’y ressente de cette tristesse majestueuse qui fait tout le plaisir de la tragédie.’²

Racine then develops his idea that this pleasure can only be given by the *vraisemblable* : ‘ il n’y a que le vraisemblable qui touche dans la tragédie.’ It is not likely, he says, that a crowd of varied actions could be naturally compressed within the compass of a single drama. Thus he is impelled to see that great breadth and variety of action are incompatible with the unities. The perfectly consistent argument thus presented is obtained by our beginning at the end of the Préface and working backwards. The reader will easily see on turning to the text that Racine starts from what is logically his conclusion : and has worked out the steps after having announced his decision. For it was a strong impulse that at first led him to express himself in dramatic terms which were similar to those of the Greek stage.

¹ *Bérénice*, Préface.

² Ibid.

‘ Il y avoit longtemps que je voulois essayer si je pourrois faire une tragédie avec cette simplicité d’action qui a été si fort du goût des anciens.’¹

The unity and simplicity which Racine sought were the necessary limits to his manner of dramatic expression. In the case of Corneille, as we have seen, the unity and simplicity lie in the motive power of the human will; and the play is enriched, and sometimes indeed cumbered, by the addition of elements in more or less close connexion with the central idea, which tend to expand it, and to show its working in the world of men and of things. In Racine the contrary is the case. There is no unity of mind, of intention in his central characters: the conflict is within the human soul. When the tragedy becomes thus narrowed in area, surrounding illustrations of the conflict become unnecessary. The interest is focused on the one or two persons in whom may be seen the tragic force of the inner struggle.

This contrast between Corneille and Racine may be illustrated in other ways. We may, for instance, notice that as in the early work of Corneille, [Racine’s dramatic conflict is that of the will with passion,] while in the Cornelian tragedy the bent has been taken, and the will is supreme. Or again, we may express the idea of the Racinian drama as that of the tragic doubt, the doubt which consumed Hamlet, and of which we see traces in *Cinna* and *Le Cid*.

‘ Un doute tragique est, nous l’avons vu, au cœur de chacune de ses pièces.’²

There are, then, three points of interest in the action of Racine: its simplicity, its presentation of the nascent struggle of passion and will, and the tragic doubt which that struggle arouses.

The simplicity of action in Racine could be illustrated

¹ *Bérénice*, Préface.

² Le Bidois, *De l’action dans la tragédie de Racine*, p. 28.

from all his plays, but nowhere more strongly than where he modifies the Greek original to express his purpose. The dramatic motive in *Les Frères Ennemis* is the terrible inborn hatred of the brothers. It crushes every other possible feeling, Hémon's love and loyalty to Antigone, Jocaste's appeal to the two brothers, her sons. The note of fatality is sounded early in the play, when Jocaste says :

Tu ne t'étonnes pas si mes fils sont perfides,
S'ils sont tous deux méchants, et s'ils sont parricides :
Tu sais qu'ils sont sortis d'un sang incestueux,
Et tu t'étonnerais s'ils étoient vertueux,¹

and made more deeply incisive by Étéocle.² The conflict of the two brothers brings down the life and happiness of all the characters in one common catastrophe. Racine's Préface shows that he consciously simplified the action which in Rotrou's rendering of the same subject had been complex.³

In his next play, *Alexandre*, the conflict of Alexandre with Porus is the motive ; and the defeat of Porus brings with it the death and humiliation of Taxile, but by a counter-

¹ *Les Frères Ennemis*, act i, sc. 1.

² Je ne sais si mon cœur s'apaisera jamais :
Ce n'est pas son orgueil, c'est lui seul que je hais.
Nous avons l'un et l'autre une haine obstinée.
Elle n'est pas, Créon, l'ouvrage d'une année ;
Elle est née avec nous : et sa noire fureur,
Aussitôt que la vie, entra dans notre cœur.
Nous étions ennemis dès la plus tendre enfance ;
Que dis-je ! nous l'étions avant notre naissance.
Triste et fatal effet d'un sang incestueux !
Pendant qu'un même sein nous renfermoit tous deux,
Dans les flancs de ma mère une guerre intestine
De nos divisions lui marque l'origine.
Elles ont, tu le sais, paru dans le berceau,
Et nous suivront peut-être encor dans le tombeau.

Les Frères Ennemis, act iv, sc. 1.

³ ' Ce sujet avoit été autrefois traité par Rotrou . . . et il avoit réuni en une seule pièce deux actions différentes. Et quelle apparence de leur donner d'autres intérêts que ceux de cette fameuse *haine* qui les occupoit tout entiers ? ' (*Les Frères Ennemis*, Préface).

stroke enables the greatness of Alexandre to be doubly asserted in the victory and in the clemency of the last scene.¹

In the drama of a crime which we have in *Britannicus*, the action again is simple : and this is one of the plays at which Racine had worked with especially long and anxious care.

‘Voici celle de mes tragédies que je puis dire que j’ai le plus travaillée.’²

Racine opposes the cruel Néron to the hero Britannicus, and the minor characters carry out the same sharp division between good and evil. Narcisse is Néron’s evil confidant, Burrhus the honest man. The key to the whole situation is in Néron’s words :

J’embrasse mon rival, mais c’est pour l’étouffer.³

An examination of Racine’s other plays brings out more strongly still the subordination of the interest to the central drama of character. For instance, in *Phèdre*, a comparison with the original story shows how Racine has simplified the plot by banishing the supernatural element, and by reducing Hippolyte to a secondary figure, so that Phèdre stands out and focuses the attention of the reader on herself. In the *Hippolytus* of Euripides the tragic struggle is in the mind

1

Alexandre.

Parlez donc, dites-moi,
Comment prétendez-vous que je vous traite ?

Porus.

En roi.

Alexandre.

Eh bien ! c’est donc en roi qu’il faut que je vous traite.
Je ne laisserai point ma victoire imparfaite,
Vous l’avez souhaité, vous ne vous plaindrez pas.
Régnez toujours, Porus, je vous rends vos États.
Avec mon amitié recevez Axiane.

Alexandre, act v, sc. 3.² *Britannicus*, Seconde Préface.³ *Ibid.*, act iv, sc. 3.

of Hippolytus himself, who suffers in defence of the sanctity of his own mind.

Sore-stricken man, bethink thee in this stress,
Thou dost but die for thine own nobleness,¹

says Artemis to him. Phaedra's tragic temptation occurs in the working out of a hereditary crime. On the canvas of Euripides we see the conclusion of Phaedra's tragedy, but the dramatic subject of the play is the conflict which is central to Hippolytus. Racine disturbs the original balance of the play, and changes its moral appeal. In the Préface to *Phèdre* he explains that he attempts to excite the pity of the spectators rather than their indignation by representing Hippolyte as open to the snares of passion, as in fact guilty in thought though not in deed. Thus the pity he enlists for Hippolytus is not the pity excited by Euripides' play for one who is at the same time the victor and victim of fate; it is rather a semi-contemptuous feeling for a weakness which has placed Hippolyte below Phèdre in dramatic appeal.²

Sometimes, as in *Andromaque*, Racine succeeds in welding the plot more closely together than was done in the original story. Where Corneille often admits double motives, as for instance those of love and glory, Racine draws the threads of the plot together and makes one motive predominate strongly.³ By this means he restates the drama of Euripides

¹ *Hippolytus*, trans. Prof. Gilbert Murray, p. 70.

² 'Pour ce qui est du personnage d'Hippolyte, j'avois remarqué dans les anciens qu'on reprochoit à Euripide de l'avoir représenté comme un philosophe exempt de toute imperfection, ce qui faisoit que la mort de ce jeune prince causoit beaucoup plus d'indignation que de pitié. J'ai cru lui devoir donner quelque foiblesse qui le rendroit un peu coupable envers son père, sans pourtant lui rien ôter de cette grandeur d'âme avec laquelle il épargne l'honneur de Phèdre, et se laisse opprimer sans l'accuser. J'appelle foiblesse la passion qu'il ressent malgré lui pour Aricie, qui est la fille et la sœur des ennemis mortels de son père.'

³ See Le Bidois, *De l'action dans la tragédie de Racine*, p. 11: 'Des

in a way that gives his plays great point and concentration, as well as simplicity of action.

Another change often brought about by Racine is to substitute a conflict between passion and duty for that on the Greek stage between two duties. He is the first of the long generation of French writers to give to passion a claim on conduct which before his time had been kept for duty alone. The struggle between passion and will which in the drama of Racine preludes the great catastrophe, is to be traced throughout all his plays. In *Les Frères Ennemis*, Antigone accuses the perverted will of Créon of having brought about the evil.¹ In *Alexandre*, Taxile, up to the last, is hoping for the support of Axiane's love in order to strengthen his trembling will against Alexandre.² In the later plays we have examples of all types of struggle—from Andromaque's consistent attempt at moral control to Phèdre's sudden collapse into frenzied and abnormal passion. In the dialogue between Pyrrhus and Oreste there is the indication of combat.

deux drames soudés ensemble dans l'*Andromaque* d'Euripide . . . la jalousie d'Hermione et la mort de Pyrrhus, Racine n'en fait qu'un seul : car ces intérêts successifs et divers se fondent ici étroitement, et selon le mot de Pylade,

‘Tout dépend de Pyrrhus, et surtout d'Hermione.’

Andromaque, act iii, sc. 1.

- ¹ N'imputez qu'à vous seul la mort du roi mon frère,
Et n'en accusez point la céleste colère.
A ce combat fatal vous seul l'avez conduit.
Il a cru vos conseils ; sa mort en est le fruit.

Les Frères Ennemis, act v, sc. 3.

- ² Non, je ne puis plus vivre accablé de sa haine :
Il faut que je me jette aux pieds de l'inhumaine.
J'y cours : je vais m'offrir à servir son courroux,
Même contre Alexandre et même contre vous.

Il faut que tout périsse, ou que je sois heureux.

Alexandre, act iv, sc. 4.

Oreste.

Hermione, seigneur, arrêtera vos coups :
Ses yeux s'opposèrent entre son père et vous.

Pyrrhus.

Hermione, seigneur, peut m'être toujours chère,
Je puis l'aimer, sans être esclave de son père ;
Et je saurai peut-être accorder quelque jour
Les soins de ma grandeur et ceux de mon amour.¹

Andromaque's reproach to Pyrrhus is her greatest effort for control :

Seigneur, que faites-vous, et que dira la Grèce ?
Faut-il qu'un si grand cœur montre tant de foiblesse ?
Voulez-vous qu'un dessein si beau, si généreux,
Passe pour le transport d'un esprit amoureux ?
Captive, toujours triste, importune à moi-même,
Pouvez-vous souhaiter qu'Andromaque vous aime ? ²

But in Racine's plays the passion often takes the violent character of the East, where it is the sudden fierce zeal for possession, and where, as in *Othello*, love draws with it not only jealousy but hatred. This is the character of Oreste's passion for Hermione.³

The struggle with the will is so soon over that it is hardly perceptible. This is also the case with Phèdre. Cénone implores her to recover herself :

Chaque moment vous tue ;
Réparez promptement votre force abattue,
Tandis que de vos jours, prêts à se consumer,
Le flambeau dure encore, et peut se rallumer.⁴

¹ *Andromaque*, act i, sc. 2.

² *Ibid.*, sc. 3.

³ J'irai loin d'elle encor tâcher de l'oublier ?
Non, non ; à mes tourments je veux l'associer :
C'est trop gémir tout seul. Je suis las qu'on me plaigue,
Je prétends qu'à mon tour l'inhumaine me craigne,
Et que ses yeux cruels, à pleurer condamnés,
Me rendent tous les noms que je leur ai donnés.

Andromaque, act iii, sc. 1.

⁴ *Phèdre*, act i, sc. 3.

But the criminal passion has entire command of Phèdre's soul :

De l'amour j'ai toutes les fureurs.

Ænone.

Pour qui ?

Phèdre.

Tu vas ouïr le comble des horreurs.

J'aime . . . à ce nom fatal je tremble, je frissonne.

J'aime. . .

Ænone.

Qui ?

Phèdre.

Tu connais ce fils d'Amazone,

Ce prince si longtemps par moi-même opprimé ?

Ænone.

Hippolyte ? grands dieux !

Phèdre.

C'est toi qui l'as nommé.¹

When the final catastrophe is imminent, all that remains to Phèdre is the wish to have died before her confession to Hippolyte.

In *Athalie* the interest of the struggle between good and evil is sustained throughout the play, and worked up to the final crisis and triumphant assertion of the right. *Esther* and *Athalie* stand here on a different basis from the Roman and Greek plays. To whatever cause we attribute Racine's withdrawal from dramatic composition—whether his duties as the king's historiographer and his courtly predilections, or the emotional dissatisfaction with his life, or the positive recovery of the Port-Royal spirit, are considered to have had most weight in his decision, it is clear from his last two plays, written after the crisis, that a positive inspiration

¹ *Phèdre*, act i, sc. 3.

and belief in goodness has ennobled the treatment of the subjects there presented. No generalization true of the earlier plays can also include *Esther* and *Athalie*. For here we have the camp of the Lord and of His enemies—the opposition of the just and the unjust, and the potential victory of good over evil.

The tragic doubt aroused by Racinian tragedy has many degrees of intensity, therefore, and a termination which may be for good or for evil.¹ It appears with pathetic force in the first act of Racine's plays, and is resolved in the fourth. Thus in *Britannicus*, Néron had at first resolved to spare the youth, but the first scene in the first act shows his self-command giving way.

Contre Britannicus Néron s'est déclaré ;
L'impatient Néron cesse de se contraindre,
Las de se faire aimer, il veut se faire craindre.²

The crisis is reached in the fourth act.³

In *Iphigénie*, Agamemnon, in his opening scene with Arcas, is suddenly drawn down into the depths of doubt and foreboding, where lies his consciousness of the death in store for Iphigénie.

Qu'est ce qu'on vous écrit ? Daignez m'avertir,⁴

says Arcas, and from the hidden background of Agamemnon's soul come out the words :

Non, tu ne mourras point : je n'y puis consentir.⁵

In the fourth act Agamemnon, having given the order for her death and then withdrawn it, claims a truce for the rest

¹ The connexion of this doubt with the sense of fatality in the inner working of the minds of the characters will be treated separately. For the moment we are concerned with the form and presentation of the drama.

² *Britannicus*, act i, sc. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, act iv, sc. 3.

⁴ *Iphigénie*, act i, sc. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*

of the day, which in fact enables Ériphile to offer herself and Iphigénie to be saved.¹

In *Phèdre*, in the first act, we have the scene of the avowal of her criminal love for Hippolyte,² and in the fourth act the astonishing recoil of her nature on the confidante Œnone, who has dared to call in the example of the gods to palliate Phèdre's evil desires.³ The suggestion has gone too far, and the weak confidante has but hastened Phèdre's self-destruction.

In all these cases, and equally in the other plays, the doubt is resolved in the fourth act. Throughout the dramatic work of Racine the development from act to act is clear and consistent. This depends partly on his ability for logical construction, and on the fact that each drama is the history of a crisis, but much more on the psychological law, that where will or purpose is not an active principle in a character, the passions follow a course which is as determined as the conception of the workings of external nature.⁴

¹ *Iphigénie*, act iv, sc. 10.

² *Phèdre*, act i, sc. 2.

³

Œnone.

La foiblesse aux humains n'est que trop naturelle :
Mortelle, subissez le sort d'une mortelle.
Vous vous plaignez d'un joug imposé dès longtemps,
Les dieux mêmes, les dieux de l'Olympe habitants,
Qui d'un bruit si terrible épouvantent les crimes,
Ont brûlé quelquefois de feux illégitimes.

Phèdre.

Qu'entends-je ? Quels conseils ose-t-on me donner ?
Ainsi donc, jusqu'au bout tu veux m'empoisonner,
Malheureuse ! voilà comme tu m'as perdue ;

Je ne t'écoute plus. Va-t-en, monstre exécration.

Phèdre, act i, sc. 3.

⁴ ' Et en effet rien de plus savant que la composition d'*Andromaque*. Mais où ce savant mécanisme théâtral a-t-il pris sa source ? Dans le mécanisme même de la passion. S'il y a un drame où l'homme apparaisse comme un automate spirituel, c'est dans le premier chef-d'œuvre de Racine. Excepté dans le personnage d'*Andromaque* le libre arbitre n'y joue aucun rôle. Tous les personnages sont la proie non pas du destin,

The mechanism of the passions is a reduction under natural law of a life that has no impulse to unification or to moral progress. This is generally true of Racine's Roman and Greek plays. The Hebrew plays, which, as we shall see, suppose a background of good as well as evil forces, and also imply the Divine inspiration of the human will, are governed by a fatality that is Jansenist rather than Pagan in its nature; and in them the tragic doubt increases in intensity, and is resolved in the last act, not earlier.¹

Of what nature is the fate that insidiously wrecks the will of man in the Racinian tragedies? It is not, strictly speaking, the Greek *Nemesis* or retaliation; neither is it *ἀνάγκη*, necessity. It is in no sense a supernatural force acting outside human agency, and unconnected with human experience. Racine's own sensibility had taught him that there is a close relation between inner compulsion and external necessity. The punishment meted out by the gods is somehow also the consequence of individual sin. In an obscure but perfectly consistent way fate and passion in the Racinian drama are one.

In so far as passion paralyses and destroys the freedom and purpose of the human will, it reduces the inner workings of the mind to a kind of mechanism which is as consistent and determined as the aspect of the external world. Here at once we get not only an analogy, but an actual relation between inner and outer necessity. This point is worked out by Janet:

comme chez les Grecs, mais des passions, et non seulement de leurs propres passions, mais des passions d'autrui. Aucun ne se possède: tous sont entraînés et ballottés. On peut dire d'eux ce que Malebranche disait si énergiquement de l'homme: "Il n'agit pas, il *est agi*" (Paul Janet, 'La Psychologie de Racine,' *Revue des Deux Mondes*, September 15, 1875).

¹ *Esther* is cast in the limited form of three acts: the crisis occurs in act iii, sc. 5.

‘ Il semble au premier abord que la passion soit le monde du désordre et du chaos, et que ce qui la caractérise, ce soit l’absence de lois. Au contraire, les passions sont précisément les phénomènes de l’âme qui par leur ressemblance avec les phénomènes naturels sont malgré leur mobilité, leur diversité infinie, les plus faciles à réduire à des lois générales. C’est en tant que chose passionnée que l’âme est une partie de la nature, au lieu de s’y montrer reine et maîtresse. Leibnitz a dit que l’âme humaine est “un automate spirituel”. Il entendait par là que les phénomènes de l’âme sont soumis à un déterminisme aussi rigoureux, quoique tout interne, que les phénomènes du corps. Tout est lié, tout est réglé, au dedans comme au dehors. Si l’on fait abstraction du libre arbitre, cette théorie est frappante de vérité, et dans Racine en particulier, où le rôle du libre arbitre est assez effacé, on en trouve une remarquable confirmation. Non seulement on a assimilé le déterminisme interne des passions à celui des phénomènes externes, mais on a cru constater des analogies plus frappantes encore et d’une nature plus spéciale entre les lois de ce déterminisme et les lois du mouvement dans la nature. En un mot, la psychologie des passions a été considérée comme une partie de la mécanique.’¹

This determined and mechanical action of the passions has two modes of presentation in the drama. We may, for instance, see it in its reciprocal effect on several characters in a play, or we may study its ravages on each human personality.

(a) If we examine the reciprocal effect of passion on the chief personages of Racinian tragedy we find another possible subdivision. Passion may act on others through producing change and revolt, or through producing a temptation which multiplies the evil effects, and brings every one to a common downfall. The suggestion may be the same : it depends on the other characters whether it acts by opposition, turning love into hatred, for example, or by sympathy, creating a brotherhood in crime.

¹ Paul Janet, ‘La Psychologie de Racine,’ *Revue des Deux Mondes*, September 15, 1875.

A striking instance of the first, as Janet has pointed out, is to be found in *Andromaque*. There are four chief characters, Oreste, Hermione, Pyrrhus, Andromaque, and unrequited love is felt by Oreste to Hermione, Hermione to Pyrrhus, Pyrrhus to Andromaque. By the terms of the situation the key is in the hands of Andromaque. And Andromaque herself is torn in two by her love for her son and the memory of her dead husband. If she is faithful to Hector's memory, and in proportion as this motive prevails, she repulses Pyrrhus; he in moments of strong reaction leans to Hermione, who on her side repulses Oreste. In proportion, however, as Andromaque is moved by her love to her son, she encourages Pyrrhus who repulses Hermione, who on her side returns to Oreste. Finally Andromaque¹ conciliates her love to her son and her devotion to her husband. She consents to marry Pyrrhus, and then determines to destroy herself.

In this drama moral control and free action are only exercised by Andromaque² herself, and that only after she has come to her supreme resolution. In every other case the influence received excites an opposition in the same degree.³ At the end of the play Hermione is beside herself

¹ Ma flamme par Hector fut jadis allumée ;
Avec lui dans la tombe elle s'est enfermée.
Mais il me reste un fils. Vous saurez quelque jour,
Madame, pour un fils jusqu'où va notre amour ;
Mais vous ne saurez pas, du moins je le souhaite,
En quel trouble mortel son intérêt nous jette.

Andromaque, act iii, sc. 4.

² Je vais donc, puisqu'il faut que je me sacrifie,
Assurer à Pyrrhus le reste de ma vie ;
Je vais, en recevant sa foi sur les autels,
L'engager à mon fils par des nœuds immortels.
Mais aussitôt ma main, à moi seule funeste,
D'une infidèle vie abrégera le reste ;
Et, sauvant ma vertu, rendra ce que je dois
A Pyrrhus, à mon fils, à mon époux, à moi.

Ibid., act iv, sc. 1.

³ ' On voit que dans ce drame aucun personnage, Andromaque exceptée,

with jealousy and desire for revenge : Oreste is ready for any crime ; both are swayed and driven by the wind of their own and others' unchained passions. Hermione and Oreste are each responsible for the other's fate—suicide and madness.

When passion acts by suggesting criminal impulses to others it is no doubt because it invades weaker personalities than in the instances we have just taken. Néron, in *Britannicus*, is subject to temptation ; the few years of virtue and self-restraint on which he hypocritically prides himself were only a delay—if even that—in the development of his crimes. Narcisse is his evil genius, and appealing to all the inherent cruelty, jealousy, and pride of Néron's nature, he breaks down the attempted reconciliation between Néron and Britannicus, and Néron yields.

Mais, Narcisse, dis-moi, que veux-tu que je fasse ?
Je n'ai que trop de pente à punir son audace.¹

Another instance of external influence is shown in C  none's attempt to persuade Ph  dre that her criminal love had, after all, an excuse in the action of the gods. Ph  dre repudiates with scorn the confidante who has insidiously undermined her strength.²

(b) The law of the action of passion in the individual soul has been defined by Janet as consisting (1) in flux and reflux, and (2) in apparent succession of different passions. Racine's characters constantly run up and down the whole scale of passion ; the tortured mind rushes from one extremity to the other and back again. This phenomenon

n'est son propre ma  tre. Rien ne se passe dans leur c  ur qui naisse spontan  ment de ce c  ur lui-m  me : c'est toujours dans l'  me d'un autre qu'est le ressort qui les fait mouvoir. Tout part d'Andromaque, et elle-m  me jusqu'   sa supr  me r  solution, est    peine sa propre ma  tresse' (Janet, *La Psychologie de Racine*).

¹ *Britannicus*, act iv, sc. 4.

² *Ph  dre*, act iv, sc. 6.

can be studied in Racine's monologues in relation to the dialogues. For in the Racinian drama the monologues are not as in Corneille's, the remains of an ancient method of narration. In Racine it is passion, individual love and hate, that breaks off dialogue and drives each person to express in monologue the white heat of his feeling.¹ Take, for instance, the monologues in the play of *Andromaque*. Hermione's monologue at the beginning of the fifth act represents all the possible transitions between love and hatred.

Ah ! ne puis-je savoir si j'aime ou si je hais ? ²

And then goes on to ring the changes of passion.³

Oreste's monologue in the same play shows his anger mounting higher and higher after Hermione's repulse of him.⁴ In *Mithridate*, the king, full of suspicion of being betrayed, expresses himself in a monologue.⁵

Here, too, we see an example of the hesitation of the passionate mind, drawn rapidly to one feeling of fear and then to another.

¹ Here we find many parallels in Shakespeare, e.g. Hamlet's monologues.

² *Andromaque*, act v, sc. 1.

³ Le cruel ! de quel œil il m'a congédiée :
Sans pitié, sans douleur au moins étudiée !
L'ai-je vu s'attendrir, se troubler un moment ?
En ai-je pu tirer un seul gémissément ?
Muet à mes soupirs, tranquille à mes alarmes,
Sembloit-il seulement qu'il eût part à mes larmes ?
Et je le plains encore ! Et, pour comble d'ennui,
Mon cœur, mon lâche cœur s'intéresse pour lui !

Andromaque, act v, sc. 1.

⁴ Je deviens parricide, assassin, sacrilège :
Pour qui ? pour une ingrate à qui je le promets,
Qui même, s'il ne meurt, ne me verra jamais,
Dont j'épouse la rage !

Ibid., sc. 4.

⁵ Quoi ? de quelque côté que je tourne la vue,
La joie de tous les cœurs est pour moi disparue :
Tout m'abandonne ailleurs ! tout me trahit ici !
Pharnace, amis, maîtresse ; et toi, mon fils, aussi ?

Mithridate, act iii, sc. 3.

Voyons, examinons. Mais par où commencer ?
 Qui m'en éclaircira ? quels témoins, quel indice ?
 Le ciel en ce moment m'inspire un artifice.
 Qu'on appelle la reine. Oui, sans aller plus loin,
 Je veux l'ouïr ; mon choix s'arrête à ce témoin.¹

A similar example is found in *Bérénice*. Antiochus questions himself eagerly as to his possible relation to the queen.

Pourrai-je, sans trembler, lui dire : Je vous aime ?
 Mais quoi ! déjà je tremble ; et mon cœur agité
 Craint autant ce moment que je l'ai souhaité.

Quel fruit me reviendra d'un aveu téméraire ?
 Ah ! puisqu'il faut partir, partons sans lui déplaire.²

Other examples of passionate monologues with exactly the same characteristics of questioning and hesitation, fierce feeling and reaction are found in the remaining plays, *Bajazet*,³ *Iphigénie*,⁴ *Phèdre*.⁵

(2) Another effect noticed by Janet,⁶ of the passion of love in Racine is that it takes on the form of many other passions : despair and jealousy, and, as we have noticed before, hatred. The form of the passion of love studied by Racine is generally that in which the thirst for possession is so extreme as to destroy all balance, and almost all other motive.⁷ In this condition, when different weaknesses one after the other are displayed by the soul, we get an apparent change of attitude, which is, however, related in every case to the same original impulse.

¹ *Mithridate*, act iii, sc. 4.

² *Bérénice*, act i, sc. 2.

³ Roxane's soliloquy, act iii, sc. 7.

⁴ Agamemnon's soliloquy, act iv, sc. 8.

⁵ Thésée's speech, act iii, sc. 5, which becomes a soliloquy, though Hippolyte is still on the stage.

⁶ 'La Psychologie de Racine' (*Revue des Deux Mondes*, September 15, 1875).

⁷ Cf. Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, act i, sc. 2, and *Twelfth Night*, act v, sc. 1.

Compare with this picture of the passion of love in Racine the treatment of the motive of love in Corneille. Here it exists chiefly as a secondary motive from a dramatic point of view, but looked at from the point of the individual, it is potentially as strong as in Racine. A dramatic writer who, like Corneille, is conscious of the seeds of weakness in character which exist where the predominant motive is selfish and not social, is able to present his characters as feeling the force of the temptation all the more strongly for their self-restraint. The measure of the strength of temptation can only be taken when it is resisted to the death. Racine and Corneille should both be read if we are to gather a fair idea of the French dramatist's treatment of the passions: they represent the aspects of defeat and victory in the struggle for the freedom of the human will. Both are true to the life of their time. While many noble examples in history testify to the power which Corneille pictured, the *affaire des poisons*, which shook the moral sense of French society in 1676¹ and 1677 (between the production of *Andromaque* and *Phèdre*), explains the truth of *Phèdre* as a criticism of life, and also accounts for the revolt of feeling against the play.

While, however, in Corneille character is (spiritual) destiny, in Racine consequence is correlated with the punishment of sin. Below his psychological examination of the human mind lies the conviction of original sin, which was deep in the mind of Port-Royal, and also a sense of the strength of hereditary impulses, which Racine may have owed partly to his own observation of life, and partly also to his study of the history of Israel, but which he uses to enlist the sympathy of his readers for characters such as that of *Phèdre*. We get here the first note of decadence in

¹ The Marquise de Brinvilliers poisoned her father, brothers, and sister.

French literature. If he had merely wished to express the Jansenist sense of original sin, together with the belief that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, the moral of his plays might have been as austere as that of the Aeschylean trilogy or the Book of Job ; but Racine's use of the idea of heredity as not only an explanation but an excuse for sin, is partly due to his following the lines of Euripides' drama, and partly to his being as modern in reflecting the tendencies of his age as Euripides had been. The immediate consequence to the Racinian drama is that we get there the conception of the Nemesis or retribution hanging over the head of the tragic hero though sometimes only falling with deadly effect on a later generation. Retribution may be either immediate or delayed. In this latter case the tragic effect is heightened by the culmination of the sin of the fathers and of the children in one individual ; the penalty appears to strike with double force while really following natural law. Examples are frequent in Racine. Take, for instance, *Les Frères Ennemis*. The mad hatred of the brothers is caused by their original taint. In *Phèdre*, too, the pride of Hippolyte is traced to its source.

C'est peu qu'avec son lait une mère amazone
M'ait fait sucer encor cet orgueil qui t'étonne.¹

And Hippolyte himself alludes to Phèdre's origin as capable of instigating to sin ;² and Phèdre is fully conscious both of the force of the impulses and of her own criminal part in yielding to them.

The instrument of external punishment in the Racinian drama takes many different forms. Sometimes fatality

¹ *Phèdre*, act i, sc. 1.

² Vous me parlez toujours d'inceste et d'adultère ;
Je me tais. Cependant Phèdre sort d'une mère,
Phèdre est d'un sang, seigneur, vous le savez trop bien,
De toutes ces horreurs plus rempli que le mien.

Phèdre, act iv, sc. 2.

intervenes in the person of the gods. Or again, retaliation may be exercised through a high ruler, king or emperor; or the Divine voice be heard through the priest. Again, the crowd or the army may represent it, or the forces of nature. Is there any law underlying these manifestations? Classifying Racine's plays as dealing with Greek, Roman, or Hebrew plots, we may perhaps gather some idea of the general lines of his treatment of fatality. In the three types of story there is one fact in common; the Divine intervention is, if not concealed, at least rendered mysterious, and human or natural agency is chosen for its exercise. In the Roman plays the agent is the absolute ruler. There is a Divine right of kings and emperors. Here we recognize the note of the seventeenth century. When Néron says:

Au joug depuis longtemps ils se sont façonnés,
Ils adorent la main qui les tient enchaînées,¹

it is impossible not to recognize the habit of mind with which France considered Louis XIV. But in the same play the hidden strength of a people that in the last resort are the masters of the kingdom is indicated in the revolt of the fifth act, where the crowd surround Junie and withdraw her for ever from Néron's influence.²

In the plays where the subject is Greek the hand of the gods is alluded to. But often the method of retaliation is modified, so that natural forces are the channel for action. So in *Phèdre*, Neptune destroys Hippolyte, but the means are the gigantic wave and the sea monster.³ In *Iphigénie*, the gods compel the sacrifice, but accept it with fire from heaven, and Diana ascends in a cloud.⁴

In the Hebrew subjects—to which Racine came with a new mind after a temporary absence from the stage, the

¹ *Britannicus*.

² *Phèdre*, act v, sc. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, act v, sc. 8.

⁴ *Iphigénie*, act v, sc. 5.

inspiration is entirely real to him. This time the Divine intervention is that of a living Spirit, the action of which is part of present spiritual experience to Racine and his readers. And the Spirit speaks by the mouth of the high priest. He is expressed not by natural powers, but by a human agency that submits to the breath of the Spirit, is possessed by it, and transmits it, as passively as a musical instrument is made to convey sound. The prophet is as a reed shaken by the wind. Sea and air and the deathless hills are not more surely the helpless agents of a Divine will. Here in truth we find expressed both the Jansenist theories, that of grace and that of the helplessness of the human will. Joad, in the first act of *Athalie*, explains the sense of the power of God.

Reconnoissez, Abner, à ces traits éclatants,
Un Dieu tel aujourd'hui qu'il fut dans tous les temps:
Il sait, quand il lui plaît, faire éclater sa gloire,
Et son peuple est toujours présent à sa mémoire.¹

In Act iii Joad again utters a warning of the presence of God, this time as an avenging Spirit. When the temple is closed in the seventh scene, Joad receives the impulse of the Divine Spirit, and speaks with the Divine voice. As prophet he sees the world and time with the eyes of God.²

While, then, in the dramatic significance of Racine's plays passion is in the forefront, there is the sense of the mystic Godhead behind. In the early ages of Greek story God may be, in the mind of Racine, expressed as fire and cloud; in the Roman stories (retold by the same author),

¹ *Athalie*, act i, sc. 1.

² Quoi, fille de David, vous parlez à ce traître ?
Vous souffrez qu'il vous parle ? Et vous ne craignez pas
Que du fond de l'abîme entr'ouvert sous ses pas
Il ne sorte à l'instant des feux qui vous embrasent,
Ou qu'en tombant sur lui, ces murs ne vous écrasent ?

Athalie, act iii, sc. 5.

His strength may uphold kingdoms and speak through the mouth of the ruler and people ; but in the sacred history, as Racine conceives it, we hear His voice and He appears as to Moses on the Mount.¹

¹ Mais d'où vient que mon cœur frémit d'un saint effroi,
Est-ce l'esprit divin qui s'empare de moi ?
C'est lui-même ; il m'échauffe, il parle, mes yeux s'ouvrent,
Et ces siècles obscurs devant moi se découvrent.

Athalie, act iii, sc. 5.

CHAPTER IX

THE DRAMATIC BACKGROUND IN THE PLAYS OF RACINE

IN the drama of Racine, where the action is simple and complete, the time assigned to it is short and definitely marked. Here there is a contrast with Corneille. His drama of the will evoked no sense of the passing of time : on the plane on which it was worked out time was disregarded ; thus, in its symbolic presentation on the stage the time was undetermined.¹ But Racine's drama of the emotions is sensitive to time, to its stages and its duration. Whether time is lagging for the hot-headed lover, or hurrying the condemned wretch to execution,² it is indifferent to neither, for it is bound up with the granting or the denial of desire. So in all passionate drama the hours are told one by one as they mark happiness or suffering. There are many other illustrations of this treatment of time to be seen in Shakespeare. In *The Merchant of Venice* the tension is felt throughout the play—will the ships come to port ? will Portia arrive for the trial ? And it is part of the dramatic value of the trial scene that Portia so naturally seems to wish to delay the decision. So again, in *The Tempest* idyll, morning and evening, and the hours of the day are marked ; in *Hamlet*, the heavy leaden months of indecision, and in *Othello*, the moments of swift precipitate madness of jealousy.

Thus, too, in the passionate drama of Racine time is

¹ Le Bidois, *De l'action dans la tragédie de Racine* (speaking of Corneille's time) : ' indéterminé, donc irréel ' (p. 35).

² *As You Like It*.

invoked. Take, for example, the play of *Iphigénie*. In the first act the arrival of Achille the night before—

Et ce vainqueur, suivant de près sa renommée,
Hier avec la nuit arriva dans l'armée—¹

is followed to the terrible perplexity of Agamemnon by the entrance of Achille with the dawn of the fatal day :

Déjà le jour plus grand nous frappe et nous éclaire,
Déjà même l'on entre, et j'entends quelque bruit.
C'est Achille. Va, pars, Dieux ! Ulysse le suit.²

The repetition of the fatal word 'to-day' comes at intervals through the acts.

Achille's absence from the camp for the space of one month is also alluded to.³ As the day passes Achille marks the loss of time.⁴ Then we hear that the sacrifice of Iphigénie is to take place within the hour. '*Dans une heure elle expire.*'⁵ Agamemnon's effort to save her is thus marked.

Cette nuit même encore, on a pu vous le dire,
J'avais révoqué l'ordre où l'on me fit souscrire.⁶

Then at the supreme moment comes the demand of Agamemnon for a delay. He claims the remainder of the day that is passing.

Je vais faire suspendre une pompe funeste,
Et de ce jour, au moins, lui demander le reste.⁷

And this last effort is answered by the counter-crisis of Ériphile's sacrifice.

¹ *Iphigénie*, act i, sc. 1.

² Ibid.

³ Quoi, seigneur, ne le savez-vous pas,
Vous qui, depuis un mois, brûlant sur ce rivage,
Avez conclu vous-même et hâté leur voyage ?

Iphigénie, act ii, sc. 7.

⁴ Je perds trop de moments en des discours frivoles ;
Il faut des actions, et non pas des paroles.

Ibid., act iii, sc. 7.

⁵ Ibid., act iv, sc. 1.

⁶ Ibid., sc. 4.

⁷ Ibid., sc. 10.

Again, in *Andromaque*, the moments of crisis are strongly marked. Oreste has been possessed for a year with the thought of Hermione.

Voilà, depuis un an, le seul soin qui m'anime.¹

Pyrrhus, in demanding of him the hand of Hermione, asks for the marriage the next day.

Voyez-la donc. Allez, dites-lui que demain
J'attends avec la paix son cœur de votre main.²

And Pylade plots with Oreste to seize Hermione from the hands of Pyrrhus that night.

Et cette nuit, sans peine, une secrète voie
Jusqu'en votre vaisseau conduira votre proie.³

In the great scene between Hermione and Oreste which follows, Hermione urges swift vengeance on Pyrrhus, who has offered to raise *Andromaque* to his throne.

Mais si vous me vengez, vengez-moi dans une heure.⁴

And the sharp blows of her emotion sound in the verse :

S'il ne meurt aujourd'hui, je puis l'aimer demain.⁵

Oreste answers with the same incisive feeling :

Cette nuit je vous sers, cette nuit je l'attaque.⁶

Phèdre, *Bajazet*, *Bérénice*, *Britannicus*, all yield a similar result. The sudden hour of love or hate or deliverance is marked like the passing of a human life. While in *Corneille* passion is lost or merged in the supremacy of the human will, in *Racine* physical death is the only thing that can put an end to a love that is as strong as death or a jealousy as cruel as the grave. It is perhaps in the most passionate conflict of all those depicted by *Racine* that we hear the

¹ *Andromaque*, act ii, sc. 2.

² *Ibid.*, act iii, sc. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, sc. 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, sc. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, act iv, sc. 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*

clang of the passing days and hours as most resistless and unrelenting. C  none speaks to Ph  dre :

Les ombres par trois fois ont obscurci les cieux
Depuis que le sommeil n'est entr   dans vos yeux ;
Et le jour a trois fois chass   la nuit obscure
Depuis que votre corps languit sans nourriture.
A quel affreux dessein vous laissez-vous tenter ? ¹

Place, as well as time, has its strongly-marked characteristics in the drama of Racine. If, as R. L. Stevenson said, romance lies in the 'sudden consciousness of background', there is romance in this sense in all the plays of Racine. While Corneille, as we have seen, was ensnared by the difficulties of convention, and in his effort for the presentation of a complicated intrigue on a simple stage fell back on an idea of a *lieu th   tral* which was in no way symbolic of the thought of any character, alien to all, and in fact a new and empty convention, Racine feels that place is where passion lives ; the human spirit in its yearning and despair (which in Racine is always expressive), can give a reality to place, and make it thrill with meaning. Thus the realism of Racine makes his stage in truth the scene of human life ; a few planks give room enough for playing out a tragedy, a few paces serve for a mortal combat, a few feet of soil hold the mystery of love and sacrifice, of death and frustration. His characters are not only conscious of place, but they give it its whole meaning, just as on the Elizabethan stage the actors made the same raised gallery into Juliet's love-haunted balcony or into the walls of Rome.

But in Racine there is more than the consciousness of place, there is the consciousness of background, in the fullest sense of the word ; in the sense in which Stevenson used the term. In Corneille the background is the continuance

¹ *Ph  dre*, act i, sc. 3.

of the action which is spread out and felt by the lesser characters in the minor plots. But the action in Racine, narrowed down and intensified as it is, seems to need no echo in the minds of the lesser characters on the stage. Instead of this we find in his drama an over-mastering sense of outer forces ; nature as destiny, the crowd as Nemesis, the half-revealed and terrible action of the gods, which invades the great scenes, sometimes as with an incoming wave. Such a background of unknown forces cannot be forgotten : it is insistent, clamorous, urging its claim on the human life which struggles in vain against it. Maeterlinck, who is the modern inheritor of this dramatic background of Racine, while holding that the spiritual sense of the seventeenth century cannot be the motive of the twentieth, pleads that in modern drama a place may be kept for the sense of the great and mysterious powers that were conceived of in earlier dramatic work as dominating human life. His *troisième personnage* corresponds to the Divine in Racine.

‘ Dans ce temps, le génie à coup sûr, parfois le simple et honnête talent, réussissaient à nous donner au théâtre cet arrière-plan profond, ce nuage des cimes, ce courant d’infini, tout ceci et tout cela, qui n’ayant ni nom ni forme, nous autorise à mêler nos images en en parlant, et paraît nécessaire pour que l’œuvre dramatique coule à pleins bords et atteigne son niveau idéal. Aujourd’hui il y manque presque toujours ce troisième personnage, énigmatique, invisible mais partout présent, qu’on pourrait appeler le personnage sublime, qui, peut-être, n’est que l’idée inconsciente mais forte et convaincue que le poète se fait de l’univers et qui donne à l’œuvre une portée plus grande, je ne sais quoi qui continue d’y vivre après la mort du reste et permet d’y revenir sans jamais épuiser sa beauté.

‘ Mais convenons qu’il manque aussi à notre vie présente. Raviendra-t-il ? ... En tout cas, gardons-lui sa place.’¹

¹ M. Maeterlinck, *Théâtre*, Préface, pp. xvi, xvii.

Sometimes in Racine the background does not declare itself, and remains mysterious. Thus in *Bajazet*, in the first act, there is an allusion to the sudden and silent death of the slave-messenger :

Cet esclave n'est plus : un ordre, cher Osmin,
L'a fait précipiter dans le fond de l'Euxin.¹

Acomat is guided to Roxane by a *chemin obscur*.² Then in the second act we have an allusion to the labyrinthine palace full of silent intrigue.³ And when the drama of jealousy declares itself, Roxane calls upon the secret forces of the palace :

Qu'il meure : vengeons-nous. Courez : qu'on le saisisse :
Que la main des muets s'arme pour son supplice ;
Qu'ils viennent préparer ces nœuds infortunés
Par qui de ses pareils les jours sont terminés,⁴

while the *triste silence*⁵ grows, until the assassination of Roxane and that of Bajazet, and the self-murder of Atalide complete the final catastrophe.

But there are plays in which the background gives a more definite indication than that of mere fatality and mystery. In *Iphigénie*, for instance, the long calm of the winds is connected with a foreboding of sleeping strength in the army (which is the nation at war) :

Les vents nous auroient-ils exaucés cette nuit ?
Mais tout dort, et l'armée, et les vents, et Neptune.⁶

Achille looks for the cause in the mind of the gods :

Du silence des vents demandez-leur la cause.⁷

¹ *Bajazet*, act i, sc. 1.

² Ibid.

³ Et moi, vous le savez, je tiens sous ma puissance
Cette foule de chefs, d'esclaves, de muets,
Peuple que dans ses murs renferme ce palais,
Et dont à ma faveur les âmes asservies
M'ont rendue dès longtemps leur silence et leurs vies.

Bajazet, act ii, sc. 1.

⁴ Ibid., act iv, sc. 5.

⁵ Ibid., sc. 6.

⁶ *Iphigénie*, act i, sc. 1.

⁷ Ibid., sc. 2.

When fate begins to close round the unfortunate Iphigénie,
Agamemnon vividly sees the camp in movement :

Vous voyez en quels lieux vous l'avez amenée :
Tout y ressent la guerre, et non point l'hyménée :
Le tumulte d'un camp, soldats et matelots,
Un autel hérissé de dards, de javelots . . .¹

To Achilles, protecting Iphigénie, the crowd seems powerless,²
but Iphigénie herself sees Troy *en alarmes* :

Déjà Priam pâlit ; déjà Troie en alarmes
Redoute mon bûcher et frémit de vos larmes.
Allez ! et, dans ces murs vides de citoyens,
Faites pleurer ma mort aux veuves des Troyens.³

Clytemnestre breaks her anguished soul in appeal to the
sea and the winds ;⁴ and when Ériphile has gone to the
sacrifice and Iphigénie is saved, there comes the shiver of
the rising wind and the beating of the waves on the shore,
as Nature is satisfied with her victim, and opens a path to
the ships.⁵

¹ *Iphigénie*, act iii, sc. 1.

² Venez, madame, suivez-moi ;
Ne craignez ni les cris ni la foule impuissante
D'un peuple qui se presse autour de cette tente.
Paraissez : et bientôt, sans attendre mes coups,
Ces flots tumultueux s'ouvriront devant vous.
Iphigénie, act v, sc. 2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mer, tu n'ouvriras pas des abîmes nouveaux ?
Quoi ! lorsque les chassant du port qui les recèle,
L'Aulide aura vomé leur flotte criminelle,
Les vents, les mêmes vents, si longtemps accusés,
Ne te couvriront pas de ses vaisseaux brisés !
Iphigénie, act v. sc. 4.

⁵ A peine son sang coule et fait rougir la terre,
Les dieux font sur l'autel entendre le tonnerre,
Les vents agitent l'air d'heureux frémissements,
Et la mer leur répond par ses mugissements ;
La rive au loin gémit, blanchissante d'écume ;
La flamme du bûcher d'elle-même s'allume :
Le ciel brille d'éclairs, s'entr'ouvre, et parmi nous
Jette une sainte horreur qui nous rassure tous.

Ibid., sc. 6

In *Phèdre* the background is called up by Phèdre herself, and this too is in character, as her personality dominates the play. In the first act she brings before us the surrounding shadowy forests :

Dieux ! que ne suis-je assise à l'ombre des forêts !¹

Later, when she hears of the love of Hippolyte for Aricie, it is again the depths of the forest that she thinks of as the secret background for their passion :

Dans le fond des forêts alloient-ils se cacher ?²

As her fiery despair grows she feels the air full of the influences of the gods who gave her being. The upper world throbs with them ; even in the darkness of hell Minos is there to remind her that she cannot conceal herself and her crime.³

In the last scene with Phèdre, Thésée, by an effect of passion, of which Racine makes full use, seems penetrated by the same desire to hide himself from the surrounding forces of life, as Phèdre has been in her guilty isolation.

Confus, persécuté d'un mortel souvenir,
De l'univers entier je voudrois me bannir,
Tout semble s'élever contre mon injustice :
L'éclat de mon nom augmente mon supplice :
Moins connu des mortels, je me cacherois mieux.⁴

The background in *Athalie* is the sacred precinct of the temple, with its deep porticoes and vast columns, within which there lingers the memory of the great days when the nation as one people worshipped the one God, and where

¹ *Phèdre*, act i, sc. 3.

² *Ibid.*, act iv, sc. 6.

³ J'ai pour aïeul le père et le maître des dieux,
Le ciel, tout l'univers est plein de mes aïeux ;
Où me cacher ? Fuyons dans la nuit infernale.
Mais que dis-je ? mon père y tient l'urne fatale :
Le sort, dit-on, l'a mise en ses sévères mains :
Minos juge aux enfers tous les pâles humains.

Phèdre, act iv, sc. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, act v, sc. 7.

in days of persecution and hardness of heart there is still to be found the sense of a Divine Spirit controlling the destinies of the people. Abner's first words bring the scene before our eyes :

Oui, je viens dans son temple adorer l'Éternel ;
Je viens, selon l'usage antique et solennel,
Célébrer avec vous la fameuse journée
Où sur le mont Sina la loi nous fut donnée.¹

But the white dawn of day calls Joad from his colloquy with Abner to the temple services ;² Éliacin has been brought up within the temple precincts, where the voice of God speaks clearly to the faithful.³ The sound of the trumpet and the opening of the sacred doors, and the entry of the choir, mark the end of the first act.⁴

The action in the second act is quickened by the sudden irruption of Athalie into the temple. *Le temple est profané !*⁵ cries Zacharie.

Dans un des parvis, aux hommes réservé,
Cette femme superbe entre, le front levé,

¹ *Athalie*, act i, sc. 1.

² Je ne m'explique point ; mais quand l'astre du jour
Aura sur l'horizon fait le tiers de son tour,
Lorsque la troisième heure aux prières rappelle
Retrouvez-vous au temple avec ce même zèle.
Dieu pourra vous montrer, par d'importants bienfaits,
Que sa parole est stable, et ne trompe jamais.
Allez : pour ce grand jour il faut que je m'apprête
Et du temple déjà l'aube blanchit le faite.

Athalie, act i, sc. 1.

³ Et Dieu, par sa voix même appuyant notre exemple,
De plus près à leur cœur parlera dans son temple.

Ibid., sc. 2.

⁴ J'entends déjà, j'entends la trompette sacrée,
Et du temple bientôt on permettra l'entrée.
Tandis que je me vais préparer à marcher,
Chantez, louez le Dieu que vous venez chercher.

Ibid., sc. 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, act ii, sc. 2.

Et se preparoit même à passer les limites
De l'enceinte sacrée ouverte aux seuls lévites.

J'ignore si de Dieu l'ange se dévoilant
Est venu lui montrer un glaive étincelant . . .¹

The priests surround the intruder—

Mais les prêtres bientôt nous ont enveloppés :
On nous a fait sortir,²

and Abner explains to Athalie the eternal order which respects the sanctity of the temple.³

After Athalie's terrible vision of Jezebel, she is impelled by instinct to enter the temple.

Dans le temple des Juifs un instinct m'a poussée.⁴

Mathan suspects that a kingly life is sheltered in the temple, and the examination of Joas brings out the fact that the temple is the background of his life.

Ce temple est mon pays ; je n'en connois point d'autre.

Quelquefois à l'autel
Je présente au grand prêtre ou l'encens ou le sel ;
J'entends chanter de Dieu les grandeurs infinies ;
Je vois l'ordre pompeux de ces cérémonies.⁵

Mathan himself has an 'importunate memory' of the Divine Spirit and of the temple.⁶

¹ *Athalie*, act ii, sc. 2.

² Ibid.

³ Du Dieu que nous servons tel est l'ordre éternel ;
Lui-même il nous traça son temple et son autel,
Aux seuls enfants d'Aaron commit ses sacrifices,
Aux lévites marqua leur place et leurs offices . . .

Athalie, act ii, sc. 4.

⁴ Ibid., sc. 5.

⁵ Ibid., sc. 7. See Faguet, *Études Littéraires, Racine*, p. 216 et seq. :
'Le temple a dans le drame son histoire, et comme une vie propre.
Perfection même de l'art du spectacle, le décor est un personnage.'

⁶ Toutefois, je l'avoue, en ce comble de gloire,
Du Dieu que j'ai quitté l'importune mémoire

But when the storm breaks and the mystery begins to declare itself, it is of a more distant background that Josabeth thinks. Beyond the brook Kidron lies the desert, and if death is still to be met there it is a more merciful death than that meted out by human hatred and revenge.

... Je sais une secrète issue
 Par où, sans qu'on le voie, et sans être aperçue,
 De Cédron avec lui traversant le torrent,
 J'irai dans le désert où jadis en pleurant,
 Et cherchant comme nous son salut dans la fuite,
 David d'un fils rebelle évita la poursuite.
 Je craindrai moins pour lui les lions et les ours . . .¹

After the decision has been made to show Joas circled with the royal crown, the order goes out for the temple to be closed.² Priests watch over the light of the Eternal Wisdom, which they believe is to last as long as the sun and moon endure.³ When the embassy from Athalie comes, proposing peace in exchange for the treasure of the high priest, Abner appeals to the name of the holy place to induce Joad to avert the carnage by yielding.⁴ In the great last scene, however, by Joad's order armed Levites are hidden in the temple, ready to defend their king if the warriors from Athalie's camp should sound the call to arms. Here in the acute crisis of the action the appeal is to the background of armed defenders of the right on the one hand,

Jette encore en mon âme un reste de terreur,
 Et c'est ce qui redouble et nourrit ma fureur.
 Heureux si, sur son temple achevant ma vengeance,
 Je puis convaincre enfin sa haine d'impuissance,
 Et parmi le débris, le ravage et les morts,
 A force d'attentats perdre tous mes remords.

Athalie, act iii, sc. 3.

¹ *Ibid.*, sc. 6.

² *Ibid.*, sc. 7.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Faut-il que je me jette à vos sacrés genoux ?
 Au nom du lieu si saint qui n'est ouvert qu'à vous,
 Lieu terrible où de Dieu la majesté repose.
 Quelque dure que soit la loi qu'on vous impose,
 De ce coup imprévu songeons à nous parer.

Ibid., act v, sc. 2.

and to the camp of evil on the other. 'Who is on the Lord's side, who?'¹

Athalie's cry is :

Lui Joas ? lui ton roi ? Songez, méchants, songez
Que mes armes encor vous tiennent assiégés.
J'entends à haute voix tout mon camp qui m'appelle.
On vient à mon secours : tremblez, troupe rebelle.²

But the voice of the Lord has spoken and destroyed the forces of evil.³ Athalie is driven out of the temple to her death.⁴

In the play of *Esther* the background is not the *palais à volonté* of Corneille ; Racine states in his preface that the action takes place *dans le palais d'Assuérus*.⁵ Thus Racine makes his background take a real part in the aesthetic

¹ Vous, dès que cette reine, ivre d'un fol orgueil,
De la porte du temple aura passé le seuil,
Qu'elle ne pourra plus retourner en arrière,
Prenez soin qu'à l'instant la trompette guerrière
Dans le camp ennemi jette un subit effroi :
Appelez tout le peuple au secours de son roi.
Athalie, act v, sc. 3.

² *Ibid.*, sc. 5.

³ Seigneur, le temple est libre et n'a plus d'ennemis :
L'étranger est en fuite, et le Juif est soumis.
Comme le vent dans l'air dissipe la fumée,
La voix du Tout-Puissant a chassé cette armée.

Enfin, d'un même esprit tout le peuple inspiré,
Femmes, vieillards, enfants, s'embrassant avec joie,
Bénissent le Seigneur et celui qui l'envoie.

Ibid., sc. 6.

⁴ Qu'à l'instant hors du temple elle soit emmenée,
Et que la sainteté n'en soit profanée.
Allez, sacrés vengeurs de vos princes meurtris,
De leur sang par sa mort faire cesser les cris.

Ibid.

⁵ *Esther*, preface. See also the concise indications before each play of the place where the scene is to be laid. It is to be noticed that while in *Les Frères Ennemis*, *Andromaque*, *Bérénice*, and *Bajazet* the action takes place in a room, and even in *Alexandre*, *Iphigénie*, and *Phèdre* there is no indication of change of scene, in *Esther* we have instructions for the setting of the stage differently in each act. In the preface Racine states that this is intended to give variety.

value of the play. As with Shakespeare, *le décor est dans les vers*.¹ So when we compare the setting of the plays of the two great French tragedians, the solidarity is given in Corneille by the resounding purpose which rouses a sense of fellowship in the minds of the characters on the stage. In Racine the principal characters, a prey to the fatal and determined action of their passions, call out, it is true, in one another fierce answers to the play of love and jealousy and hatred, but are powerless before the unknown forces which act upon them and in them without stimulating the will.

Ils agissent en nous quand nous pensons agir.

In this lies the malady of the long shuddering cry against destiny which echoes all through the tragedy of Racine, unrelieved in the Greek plays except in the character of Andromaque, and the great exception to which are the plays of *Esther* and *Athalie*, which call up the conflict of good and evil as the background, and give the victory to the inspiration of a living religion.²

¹ Le Bidois, *De l'action dans la tragédie de Racine*, p. 70.

² 'Ajoutons cependant que, si la piété de Racine nous a ravi des chefs-d'œuvre, elle en a aussi suscité. Peut-être quelques tragédies profanes de plus, où son génie se serait imité lui-même et eût fini par s'affaiblir, sont-elles plus que compensées par cette merveille d'*Athalie* où l'imagination s'est déployée avec autant plus de richesse qu'elle s'était pendant plusieurs années reposée et rafraîchie' (Paul Janet, 'La Psychologie de Racine,' *Revue des Deux Mondes*, September 15, 1875).

CHAPTER X

RACINE AS A POETICAL DRAMATIST

It is regrettable that the critical question about the merits of Racine as France's great poet-dramatist too often takes the double form, 'Has Racine produced great drama?' and 'Has he produced great poetry?' instead of 'Does Racine give us great dramatic poetry—or a great poetical drama?' To the former pair of questions the English critic often replies by comparing Racine with the Greek dramatists, to whom he finds him inferior,¹ and with Shakespeare or Virgil or Dante or Goethe as poets, whom he finds immeasurably superior to the Frenchman.² But let us examine the question in the second form proposed, and it is possible that we may be able to give some grounds for our belief in Racine's power to express uniquely what he meant in a *genre* that has its own character of beauty and strength, and in which he is supreme.

The writer of poetical drama, as distinct from a play in prose, or a mixed *genre* such as Shakespeare's (where we find poetry used for elevated or strong feeling, and prose for relief), is bound to keep his action and characterization very much on one plane. He cannot use, for example, Shakespeare's device for enhancing in turn idealism and realism of treatment by setting up metre and the absence of metre as their outward symbols. Thus there can be no great depth of contrast emphasized on these lines within the play. The poet-dramatist is led to make use of a different method to bring out the force and values of his play.

¹ See e.g. J. C. Bailey, *The Claims of French Poetry*, p. 31.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 31, 39.

He must make the contrast with ordinary life a striking and impressive one. Therefore kings and heroes troop on to his stage, history and legend are ransacked for mighty acts; nobility of purpose and the sense of large issues must displace the littleness and the commonness of everyday surroundings.¹ Historic times gives perspective to such plays, literary expression graces them, and symbolic treatment² (such as pageantry or unusual settings) is appropriate to them. The appeal must be not to what we know too well or see too often, but either to the great elements of emotion which lie hidden in ordinary life, and are obscured by convention, though they can't be exposed on the stage, or else to something transcendental and beyond the reach of actual experience. Romanticism, in fact, is the rule of the poetic drama. Such romanticism has been shown to be a characteristic of Corneille's poetic tragedy, and of that of his predecessors and contemporaries in the neo-classic school, who borrowed their material from Greek myth and history, old French romances, or contemporary Spanish life and literature. In Racine the element of romanticism is even more in evidence. While the school of Corneille showed in a romantic atmosphere the ideal inaccessible to the ordinary experience, Racine retold the stories of Greek tragedy and Roman history with so strong a sense of the unity of time and of human passions and character in all ages³ that he forced upon the consciousness of his audience the tragic elements in modern life through the medium of an ancient plot, and by means of stage characters labelled with his-

¹ See Racine, *Préface de Bérénice*: 'Ce n'est point une nécessité qu'il y ait du sang et des morts dans une tragédie: il suffit que l'action en soit grande, que les acteurs en soient héroïques, que les passions y soient excitées, et que tout s'y ressente de cette tristesse majestueuse qui fait tout le plaisir de la tragédie.'

² Take, for example, the settings of Maeterlinck's and of Rostand's plays.

³ See the preface to *Iphigénie*.

torical or unfamiliar names. Thus Racine drew out the romance from the life surrounding him. His plays do not light up an obscure Elysium, nor point like a morality to an eternal city, but they declare the greatness of present circumstances as the veil of an ever-present tragic idea. The plain life of the ordinary man, his capacity for personal effort and suffering, and the inevitable connexion of his life with the lives of others, may be seen to cover the tragedy of hereditary evil or uncontrolled passion, or may disclose a vision of love or spiritual devotion to duty. The poetic detachment and remoteness that such plays would require are given in Racine by the formal versification and by the romanticism of the setting; he keeps the ancient forms, and we see working in them the modern idea. This method marks Racine as possessing with André Chénier¹ the fine sense of literary values which makes in the French idea the true neo-classic. Both men have put new life into ancient forms.

The concentration of plot, a unity and simplicity of treatment, even the use of the Alexandrine (which André Chénier, in common with many generations of French poets, also employed), served Racine's purpose. His peculiar power as a poetical dramatist lies in the use that he has made of the limitations inherent in his *genre*. He has escaped from the bondage of forms, and in his plays the fullness of emotional life can be pictured. A slighter aesthetic emotion would have left the Alexandrine cold and artificial.² In Racine's hands the restraints intensify the effect of the feeling he expresses. So Shakespeare in some of his most

¹ See André Chénier, *L'Invention* :

Allumons nos flambeaux à leurs feux poétiques,
Sur des pensers nouveaux faisons des vers antiques.

² See, for a further discussion of this point, Legouis, *Défense de la poésie française*, pp. 78-90.

passionate moments had recourse to a highly artificial and complicated verse-form, the sonnet. It is not at those moments that the poet flies to the freedom of prose, nor even to that of blank verse ; to richness of vocabulary or to varied metre. He seems instinctively to search for measure and form, within which can be suggested individual thought and emotion in relation to the fact of infinity.¹ [Individual emotion which interprets itself in relation to what is common to humanity therefore tends not only, as all literary experience shows, to simplicity, but to definite artistic form in expression.]

Racine turned what would have been to a lesser poet a tyranny into an opportunity for conveying sustained dramatic emotion. [But we must acknowledge that what is evident in Racine is rather the opportunity for expression than the complete embodying of emotion. For the drama of Racine claims the collaboration of the actor, and is never independent of him. This does not seem to be so strongly the case in English or German drama. It is characteristic of the more metaphorical languages (English and German) that thoughts of many degrees can be suggested through the same phrases and appeal differently to different minds. Perhaps for this reason some thrill of Shakespeare's poetry, some shadow of his pathos, can be felt even though the play may be indifferently recited or badly acted. But Racine's great scenes make a demand on their interpretation. They must be acted, not only read ; they need gesture as well as recitation : the very simplicity of the crucial passages in the plays has made them a snare to the bad actor and given their grandest opportunity to Rachel and to Sarah

¹ In verse the sense of the limit is closely connected with that of unity ; for it is the similarity of limitation in lines and stanzas that binds the whole poem together : verse then becomes the appropriate means for the expression of feeling that has a universal response.

Bernhardt. It takes a great actor to recall the spirit of Racine, and the finest interpretations only come near to giving the full possibilities of these plays.¹

Examples of great moments for the actor in Racine's drama are easily recalled, though the sustained power of the scenes that lead up to them cannot be done justice to in short quotations.

To take a few scattered examples. The play of *Bérénice* is full of these great moments, from Antiochus' words in the first act :

Non, Arsace, jamais je ne l'ai moins haïe ;²

Bérénice's :

Qu'ai-je fait ? Que veut-il ? Et que dit ce silence ?³

Titus's words :

Depuis huit jours je règne, et jusques à ce jour,
Qu'ai-je fait pour l'honneur ? J'ai tout fait pour
l'amour,⁴

to the long sigh which ends the play, when the speechless disaster has declared itself to all.⁵ Iphigénie has the wonderful line :

Ô toi qui veux ma mort, me voilà seule, frappe ;⁶

Agamemnon, in the opening of the play, while in converse with Arcas, suddenly speaks out his obsessing thought and utters to his absent daughter the words :

Non, tu ne mourras point ; je n'y puis consentir.⁷

¹ Earlier French dramatists, e.g. Alexandre Hardy (d. 1632), had shown something of this great regard for the interpretation of their plays. Hardy was reluctant to allow the publication of thirty-four out of seven hundred pieces ; this was partly no doubt due to his sense of haste in the workmanship, but partly to a desire that drama should be judged on the stage.

² *Bérénice*, act i, sc. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, act ii, sc. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, act iv, sc. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, act v, sc. 7.

⁶ *Iphigénie*, act v, sc. 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, act i, sc. 1.

Racine does not get his effects by the use of the concrete image ; these are only suitable to verse in which characters express reflection or hope. But Racine's characters all live in the present ; action and speech are fused in what is practically the same dramatic moment ; if description is necessary, it is in Racine the description of the painter, who in rapid unerring lines gives the quickest essential impression of a scene that has just struck his eyes.¹ But the emotion of the actors is given an opportunity by the extreme variety of form in Racine's phrases. There is a vivacity about his methods of address which is symbolized by the frequent use of interrogative sentences ;² and the balance of Corneille's couplets has been succeeded by extreme elasticity both of sense and of rhythm.³ The art of Racine's phrasing is then the art required by the force of emotion in his drama.

But, it will be asked, do we not miss in Racine the sense of the poetry of nature, the large and serene feeling for beauty that ennobles the plays of Shakespeare and contrasts with their realism ? Is there anything in Racine which supplies this need ? It is true that in the Racinian drama the attention of the audience is fixed on the central conflict, the scene of which is the individual life. But there is not wanting in Racine the appeal to some of the stronger and holier instincts of the race behind the turmoil of the passions

¹ See e.g. *Andromaque*, act v, sc. 5 ; Pylade's description of Hermione's death : *Phèdre*, act v, sc. 6 ; Thérémène's description of Hippolyte's death, &c.

² See Le Bidois, *La Vie dans la tragédie de Racine*, p. 318 : ' Dans tous les cas, que l'interrogation soit stratégique (cf. les questions de Narcisse dans les deux scènes avec Nérón), ou pure expression de la curiosité (*Athalie*) ou explosion de fureur, elle est, comme disaient les anciens, *un geste du discours*, dont elle accroît la force ; ajoutons qu'elle est le geste le mieux approprié à ce drame de violence et de tragique incertitude.'

³ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

and aims of individuals. The play of *Iphigénie* has many forcible examples of this. Immediately after the great scene in which Iphigénie hears she is to be the victim, the horror of which is enhanced by Clytemnestre's cry of *Sa fille*,¹ Clytemnestre's motherly feeling to her child forces her to her knees before Achille, as the possible saviour of Iphigénie :

Seigneur, c'est donc à moi d'embrasser vos genoux.²

But behind Iphigénie's own horror of death is her desire that no one should forget the relation between herself and Agamemnon :

Songez, quoi qu'il ait fait, songez qu'il est mon père.³

The dramatic tension is all the stronger from Iphigénie's desire to die as her father's daughter should :

Ma vie est votre bien ; vous voulez le reprendre :
Vos ordres sans détour pouvoient se faire entendre ;⁴

while Clytemnestre cries :

Est-ce donc être père ? Ah ! toute ma raison
Cède à la cruauté de cette trahison ;⁵

and Agamemnon :

Grands dieux, me deviez-vous laisser un cœur de père !⁶

and later :

Une mère m'attend ; une mère intrépide,
Qui défendra son sang contre un père homicide.⁷

Behind the particular tragedy lies the ideal of family love and trust thus cruelly betrayed.

The hint of issues greater than the personal ones involved brings in the appeal to the counsels of the gods. So Titus, in *Bérénice*, shows that when the Roman constancy fails at last before the persecutions of fate, this is because behind

¹ *Iphigénie*, act iii, sc. 5.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., sc. 6.

⁴ Ibid., act iv, sc. 4.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., sc. 5.

⁷ Ibid., sc. 8.

the persistency of misfortune the Roman divines a secret order of the higher powers telling him to yield.

Je me suis vu, madame, enseigner ce chemin,
Et par plus d'un héros, et par plus d'un Romain :
Lorsque trop de malheurs ont lassé leur constance,
Ils ont tous expliqué cette persévérance
Dont le sort s'attachoit à les persécuter,
Comme un ordre secret de n'y plus résister.¹

In *Iphigénie* the calm of the seas and forced inaction of the fleet is caused by the spell of the divine anger.

Le vent qui nous flattoit nous laissa dans le port.
Il fallut s'arrêter, et la rame inutile
Fatigua vainement une mer immobile.
Ce miracle inouï me fit tourner les yeux
Vers la divinité qu'on adore en ces lieux.²

In *Phèdre* the body of Hippolyte has been disfigured by his cruel death and only expresses the anger of the gods.

... A ce mot ce héros expiré
N'a laissé dans mes bras qu'un corps défiguré :
Triste objet où des dieux triomphe la colère :
Et que méconnoîtroit l'œil même de son père.³

~~The more general and infinite the appeal, naturally the more profound are the poetic phrases in Racine. So, for example, Hippolyte's expression of love to Aricie :~~

Présente je vous fuis, absente je vous trouve.⁴

Cenone's words,

Mon âme chez les morts descendra la première,
Mille chemins ouverts y conduisent toujours,
Et ma juste douleur choisira les plus courts . . .⁵

with many others, have passed into the current language of poetry.

We may perhaps conclude that Racine as a playwright served the actor's art in a way that gives his poetic drama

¹ *Bérénice*, act v, sc. 7.

² *Iphigénie*, act i, sc. 1.

³ *Phèdre*, act v, sc. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, act ii, sc. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, act i, sc. 3.

a claim not only to national but to universal recognition. His poetry is in the first instance a poetry of situation, strictly applicable to the circumstances, but it is not therefore without its greater appeal. If Racine hardly alludes to nature except as a background for passion, he appeals to the great forces of society behind the play of individual will and feeling, to the mystery of unknown forces of fate, and beyond them to the fact of an eternal Godhead.



NOTE I

CORNEILLE'S TREATMENT OF THE ARISTOTELIAN TEXT

CORNEILLE'S treatment of the Aristotelian text has been the subject of much comment. On the one hand Butcher¹ tells us that Corneille was one of the adepts in the art of adding glosses and saving clauses to the Aristotelian text, and though admitting that Corneille 'has left many luminous statements of the principles of poetry', he assumes that Corneille is eager to reconcile his own work with the Aristotelian system, of which he only became aware after some of his plays had been written. Corneille, however, in the passage referred to, first states that Aristotle's *χρηστὰ ἤθη*, if accepted literally, would cut out the great mass of good poetry, and then suggests that a well-marked or notable character may be intended.² He illustrates this point from another passage in the *Poetics*.³

'La poésie est une imitation de gens meilleurs qu'ils n'ont été, et comme les peintres font souvent des portraits flattés, qui sont plus beaux que l'original, et conservent toutefois la ressemblance, ainsi les poètes, représentant des hommes colères ou fainéants, doivent tirer une haute idée de ces qualités qu'ils leur attribuent, en sorte qu'ils s'y trouve un bel exemplaire d'équité ou de dureté ;⁴ et c'est ainsi qu'Homère a fait Achille bon.'

It seems that justification for this translation can be found in the Latin versions, and even in the contemporary Greek texts ἀγαθὸν

¹ Aristotle's *Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, p. 326 (3rd edition).

² '... S'il m'est permis de dire des conjectures sur ce qu'Aristote nous demande par là, je crois que c'est le caractère brillant et élevé d'une habitude vertueuse ou criminelle, selon qu'elle est propre et convenable à la personne qu'on introduit' (*Discours du Poème dramatique*, p. 32).

³ *Poetics*, xv. 8, 1454 b 14. Cf. Prof. Margolionth, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, p. 188, where the passage in question is translated, '... even as Homer made his Achilles a model of hardness, yet a hero.'

⁴ *Discours du Poème dramatique*, p. 32.

is found in some, though *Ἀγάθων* in others.¹ We may therefore acquit Corneille of wresting the text to enforce the merits of his own plays; his object in the *Discours* is not to comment on the Aristotelian text, but to approach the rules of art from the standpoint of dramatic experience, thus qualifying and modifying in many points the traditional view.² He appeals against Aristotle to the Greek stage, just as freely as to contemporary French experience.³ And when in 1660 he wrote the *Examens* to his own plays, he was acutely conscious of the dramatic defects of the plays and quite frank in his self-criticism.

Butcher indeed admits that Corneille's criticism of the Aristotelian theory is 'on the right track', and that Lessing in his support of the Aristotelian text and criticism of Corneille was on the wrong path,⁴ but as a matter of fact in much of his criticism Corneille was close to the thought of Aristotle. He thought tragedy required deeds and characters of heroic measure within which the frustration of the human purpose might be effectively shown, and thus he agreed with Aristotle, who was really insisting on the will-power of great individual heroes.⁵

¹ *Discours du Poème dramatique*, note, pp. 32, 33.

² *Discours des Trois Unités*, p. 112.

³ 'Beaucoup déclament contre cette règle, qu'ils nomment tyrannique, et auroient raison, si elle n'étoit fondée que sur l'autorité d'Aristote; mais ce qui la doit faire accepter, c'est la raison naturelle qui lui sert d'appui' (p. 113).

⁴ 'Lessing here, while avoiding these errors of interpretation and retaining the plain meaning of the words, does so on grounds which are wholly un-Aristotelian. . . . He is still under the influence of his great assumption, that the immediate business of tragedy is to make men better' (Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, p. 321).

⁵ Cf. Prof. Margoliouth, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, p. 157, translating Aristotle, 1450 a 15: ' . . . For Tragedy portrays not imaginary human beings, but an experience, a condition of life, i. e. happiness; and wretchedness is an experience, and the end a career, not a quality.' If this interpretation is correct it is in accordance with the view that the pursuance of an object even to death and disaster can bring with it a moral well-being. It is exactly this point that Corneille seized and developed in his Christian drama. The world of purpose was to him the world of the Christian life.

NOTE II

ADAPTATIONS OF FRENCH CLASSICAL PLAYS IN GERMANY

THE movement which in the case of the Italian players contemporary with Molière led to the reduction of written comedy to farce played by 'masques' or fixed characters, was a movement likely to recur at any time of failing or degradation in the national inspiration of the drama. The Italian players in France suffered this loss, and the time came when French ideals invaded their art, which had ceased to be vigorous enough to stand alone (1680-97). Molière in the meantime represented the French national movement as he worked up popular farce into a comedy of manners. Thus the two movements, onward and retrograde, may both be studied in France in the seventeenth century. It may perhaps be interesting to notice an even more striking example of the degradation of serious drama by which Shakespeare, Corneille, and Molière all suffered at the hands of Germany during the latter years of the seventeenth century and the first part of the eighteenth. Germany had undergone the hardships of national disunion, which issued in the Thirty Years' War, and were strongly emphasized by the Peace of Westphalia which concluded it. Her national unity was still very far off. While in this condition Germany was visited by bands of strolling players, who passed from town to town, giving exhibitions of every type of drama which had a popular appeal. These were known in the seventeenth century as the 'English actors'. Judging from the characters in their troupe, it is probable that they had reached Germany through Holland, as the typical clown of the English stage of that period, Jak Pudding, was replaced by the Dutch Pickelhäring or Stockfish. In 1620 these actors advertised 'English comedies and tragedies, beautiful, magnificent, and choice, with Pickelhäring . . . interesting and sometimes authentic stories . . . played by the English in Germany.'¹ They brought, in fact, bloody

¹ See Tieck, *Deutsches Theater*, p. xxiii.

tragedies, thrilling melodramas, mysteries, operettas, gymnastic exhibitions and fairy-tales, in all of which Pickelhäring the clown, the 'old salt' who added spicy remarks at all inappropriate moments, was introduced with the words, 'All hier agiret Pickelhäring'. 'He who neglects to put Pickelhäring into a piece,' says a contemporary writer, 'is like a cook who serves a joint without Salad.'¹ The first effort of this popular stage was to adapt Shakespeare. *The Taming of the Shrew* was combined with the story of Esther, *Hamlet* was made into an historical play, *Romeo and Juliet* travestied. To these rough and degraded versions of Shakespeare were sometimes added sentimental dramas. Some are found in a collection of 1630, and the language is that of the *précieuse* school.

The eighteenth century, however, was marked by a change. Bands of students who had read French classical plays, and were also acquainted with some Greek plays, began to parade the country and perform in the towns, very much as the 'English actors' had done before them. They made use of the farcical element so popular in Germany, and combined the historic Pickelhäring with a 'masque' of German origin, Hans Wurst, whose rôle in farce was developed by the student actors. Wurst, a large and comic character, and a great eater, alternated in their versions of Greek plays, such as the *Medea*, with the French Arlequin of Italian origin. He also invaded Biblical plays.

By the same actors Corneille's plays were put upon the stage in unrecognizable shape. For example, the tragedy of *Polyeucte* was re-written in German prose; all the suggestiveness was eliminated, and the spiritual events were given concrete form. Pauline's dream was acted on the stage. In the last act letters of fire were seen on the wall behind to state the moral, 'The happy life is eternal,' while an angel of light appeared to ratify Polyeucte's final decision. Comic relief was suggested by the stage directions at the end of most of the scenes: *Après cela on tue plusieurs citoyens*. By way of *intermède* Neptune arrived after one act, Pan and his pipes after another, and Cupid after a third.

Molière had no happier fate. For Mascarille or Sganarelle

¹ See Grucker, *Doctrines littéraires de l'Allemagne*.

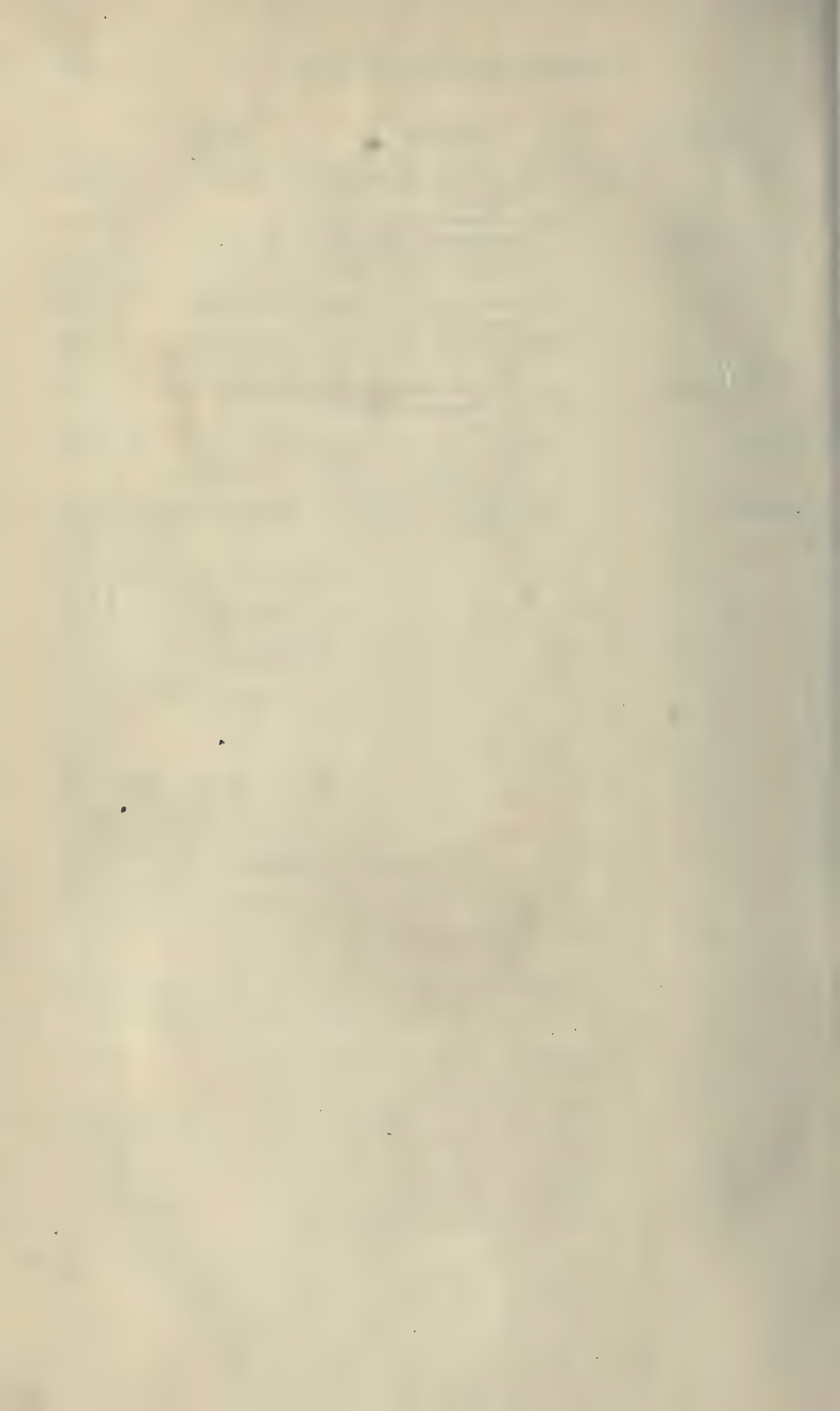
was substituted in every case Hans Wurst. The student actors reproduced with care and fair accuracy all Molière's tirades against luxury and hypocrisy, learning and the learned professions, with all of which tirades they had much sympathy. Molière appeared to them as the good and honest *bourgeois*, who resented the pretensions of the aristocracy, and the pre-revolution habit of mind agreed with him in this.

Some subjects in Molière were, of course, already common property; for example, the plots of *La Jalousie du Barbouillé* and *Le Mariage Forcé*, which had been used both by Boccaccio and Hans Sachs; but by 1670 a variety of Molière's other plays had been adapted and acted—*Les Précieuses ridicules*, *Tartufe*, *Sganarelle*, *George Dandin*, *Don Juan*, and *Le Médecin malgré lui*. Little by little, however, the way was being prepared for the *comédie bourgeoise* in Germany, and after the middle of the eighteenth century adaptations of Molière were less common. (See for further detail, Ehrhard, *Les Comédies de Molière en Allemagne*.)

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

	CORNEILLE.	MOLIÈRE.	RACINE.	
1629	Mélite . . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1630	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1631	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1632	Clitandre . . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1633	La Veuve, La Galerie du Palais, La Place Royale	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1634	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1635	Médée . . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1636	Le Cid, L'Illusion Comique	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1637	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1638	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1639	Horace . . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1640	Cinna . . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1641	Polyeucte, La Mort de Pompée	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1642	Le Menteur . . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1643	La Suite du Menteur . . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1644	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1645	Rodogune . . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1646	Théodore, Héraclius . . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1647	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1648	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1649	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1650	Don Sanche d'Aragon, Andromède	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1651	Nicomède . . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1652	Pertharite . . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1653	. . . . .	L'Étourdi . . . . .	. . . . .	16
1654	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1655	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1656	. . . . .	Dépit Amoureux . . . . .	. . . . .	16
1657	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1658	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	16
1659	Œdipe	Les Précieuses Ridicules . . . . .	. . . . .	16
1660	La Conquête de la Toison d'or	Sganarelle . . . . .	. . . . .	16
1661	. . . . .	Don Garcie de Navarre, L'École des Maris, Les Fâcheux	. . . . .	16
1662	Sertorius	L'École des Femmes . . . . .	. . . . .	16
1663	Sophonisbe	La Critique de l'École des Femmes, L'Im- promptu de Versailles	. . . . .	16
1664	Othon	Le Mariage Forcé, La Prin- cesse d'Élide, Tartufe	Les Frères Ennemis	16

	CORNEILLE.	MOLIÈRE.	RACINE.	
1665	.	Don Juan, L'Amour Médecin	Alexandre .	1665
1666	.	Le Misanthrope, Le Médecin malgré lui, Mélicerte, Le Sicilien	.	1666
1667	.	.	Andromaque .	1667
1668	.	Amphitryon, George Dandin, L'Avare	Les Plaideurs .	1668
1669	.	Monsieur de Pourceaugnac	Britannicus .	1669
1670	Tite et Bérénice .	Les Amants Magnifiques, Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme	Bérénice .	1670
1671	Psyché .	Psyché, Les Fourberies de Scapin, La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas	.	1671
1672	Pulchérie .	Les Femmes Savantes .	Bajazet, Iphigénie	1672
1673	.	Le Malade Imaginaire .	.	1673
1674	Suréna .	.	.	1674
1675	.	.	.	1675
1676	.	.	.	1676
1677	.	.	Phèdre .	1677
1678	.	.	.	1678
1679	.	.	Mithridate .	1679
1680	.	.	.	1680
1681	.	.	.	1681
1682	.	.	.	1682
1683	.	.	.	1683
1684	.	.	.	1684
1685	.	.	.	1685
1686	.	.	.	1686
1687	.	.	.	1687
1688	.	.	.	1688
1689	.	.	Esther .	1689
1690	.	.	.	1690
1691	.	.	Athalie .	1691



INDEX

A

Abbé d'Aubignac, 48 *and note*, 49.
 Abner, 178 ff.
 Achille, 171, 175 f., 189.
 Acomat, 175.
Adelphi, 117 *note*.
 Égée, 63.
 Aeschylus, 18, 78, 92.
 Agamemnon (Tontain), 27 *note* ;
 (Duchât), *ibid*.
 Agamemnon, 25 f., 26, 157, 164 *note*,
 171, 176, 187.
 Agésilas, 50.
 Agnès, 32 *note*, 123 f., 134.
 Alain, 122.
 Alarcón, Ruiz de, 61 *note*, 70 *and*
note, 142.
 Albert, 99, 105.
 Albin, 58.
 Alceste, 30 *note*, 135 ff.
 Alcidon, 15.
Alexandre, 151, 154 *and note*, 181
note.
Alexandre, 151 f., 154 *and note*.
A Midsummer-Night's Dream, 29,
 141.
Amor Malato, 110.
Amphitryon, 132, 143 *and note*.
 Andreini, F., 107, 109.
Andromaque, 50, 153, 154 *note*, 155
note, 161 *and notes*, 163 *and notes*,
 165, 172 *and notes*, 181 *note*, 188
note.
Andromaque, 155, 161, 172, 182.
Andromède, 46.
 Angélique, 134.
 Anselme, 141.
Antigone (Garnier), 27 *note* ; (So-
 phocles), 77 *note*.
Antigone, 151, 154.
 Antiochus, 164, 187.
 Apollo, 94.
 Argan, 100, 134, 141.
 Argensola, 62.

Aricie, 177, 190.
 Ariste, 118, 119 *note*, 120 f.
 Aristotle, 11 f., 20 *and note*, 38, 48 f.,
 54, 76, 77 *and note*, 81 *and*
note, 87, 91 *note*, 92, 94 *note*, 137,
 193 f.
Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine
Art, 76, 77 *note*, 78 *note*, 81 *note*,
 89 *note*, 94 *note*, 193 f.
 Arlequin, or Arlecchino, 108, 110,
 113.
 Arnolphe, 123 f.
 Artemis, 153.
A Study of the Drama, 20 *note*,
 32 *note*.
As You Like It, 170 *note*.
 Atalide, 175.
Athalie, 85 *note*, 156 f., 168 *and*
notes, 177, 178 *notes*, 179 *notes*, 180
notes, 181 *notes*, 184.
Athalie, 178 ff.
 Attila, 50.
 Auguste, 93.
 Axiane, 154.

B

Bailey, J. C., 183 *note*.
Bajazet, 31 *note*, 51 *note*, 164, 172,
 175 *and note*.
Bajazet, 175, 181 *note*.
 Balzac, H. de, 13, 42 ff.
 Barrida, Francesco de la, 62 *note*.
 Beauchamps, 60 *note*.
 Beaumarchais, 34 *note*.
 Bélise, 134.
 Beltrame, 105.
Bérénice, 25 *note*, 50, 149 *and notes*,
 164 *and note*, 172, 181 *note*, 187
and notes, 189, 190 *note*.
Bérénice, 187.
 Bergson, H., 16 *and note*, 18 *note*,
 139 *note*, 140 *notes*, 146 *note*.
 Bernhardt, Sarah, 186.
Bibliothèque française, 43 *note*.

Blaze de Bury, 30 *note*, 32 *note*.
 Boccaccio, 102, 117.
 Boileau, 50, 115, 122, 131 *note*.
 Bois-Robert, 37, 41.
 Bradley, 20 *note*, 80, 85 *note*.
 Brander Matthews, 20 *note*, 32 *note*,
 66 *note*.
 Brinvilliers, Marquise de, 165 *note*.
 Britannicus, 25 *and notes*, 148 *and*
notes, 152 *and notes*, 157 *and*
note, 162 *and note*, 167 *note*, 172.
 Brunetière, 19 *and note*.
 Burrhus, 148.
 Butcher, 76, 77 *note*, 78 *note*, 81 *note*,
 89 *note*, 94 *note*.

C

Calchas, 26.
 Calderón, 58, 63 f., 65 *and note*, 66,
 67 *and note*, 68 *and note*, 69 *and*
note, 70, 71 *and note*, 72 *note*, 73.
 Camille, 43, 52.
 Castelvetro, 91 *note*.
 Castro, G. de, 42.
 Célie, 142.
 Célimène, 136.
 Cervantes, 144.
 Chapelain, 39 *and notes*, 41.
 Charles V, 65.
 Chénier, André, 185 *and note*.
 Chimène, 38 f., 52.
 Chrysanthé, 14 f.
 Cinna, 13, 16 *and note*, 43 f., 46, 52,
 82 *and note*, 93 *and notes*, 150.
 Cinna, 93.
 Cinthio, Giraldo, 91 *note*.
 Clarice, 14, 16 *note*.
 Claveret, 40.
 Cléante, 130.
 Clitandre, 36, 60 *note*, 143 *note*.
 Cliton, 13 *note*.
 Clytemnestre, 176, 189.
 Colbert, 131 *note*.
 Coleridge, 20 *and note*.
 Colletet, 37.
Comedy of Errors, 140.
 Comici confidenti, 107.
 Condé, 26 *note*, 46.
Coplas por la muerte de su padre,
 64 *note*.
 Coriolanus, 24 *and notes*, 137.
 Corneille, P., 11, 12 *note*, 13 *and*
note, 14 *and note*, 16 ff., 19 *and*
note, 21, 25, 27 f., 31, 35 ff., 43

and note, 44-55, 57 f., 59 *and note*,
 60, 61 *and note*, 63, 66 f., 70 *and*
note, 71, 73 ff., 76 *and note*, 77
note, 79 f., 81 *and notes*, 82 f.,
 85 *note*, 86 *note*, 87 *and note*, 89
and notes, 90 *and notes*, 91, 92 *and*
notes, 93, 94 *and notes*, 96, 98, 100
note, 123, 131 *note*, 136 ff., 141 ff.,
 145, 148, 150, 153, 163, 165, 170,
 173, 181 f., 184, 188, 193 f.

Corneille, T., 51.

Corneille (Lanson), 61 *note*, 84 *note*.

Corneille et la Poétique d'Aristote,
 52 *note*, 86 *note*, 96 *note*.

Corneille et le Théâtre espagnol, 62
note, 64 *note*, 71 *note*, 72 *note*.

Corneille, the neo-classic tragedy and
 the Greek, 78 *note*.

Courtney, W. H., 24 *note*.

Critique de Sophonisbe, 48 *note*.

Cuisinier Français, 126 *and note*.

Curiace, 52.

Cyrano de Bergerac, 100.

D

Dalibray, 44.

Dante, 114 *note*, 183.

Davenport, 22.

Décie, 55.

Dédicace d'Andromède, 46 *note*.

Défense de la Poésie française, 21
note, 185 *note*.

Défense de Sophonisbe, 48 *note*, 49
note.

Défense du Cid, 38.

De l'action dans la tragédie de
 Racine, 150 *note*, 153 *note*, 170,
 182 *note*.

Dépit Amoureux, 99, 105 f., 114.

Descartes, 59 *note*, 83 *note*, 131 *note*,
 138 *note*.

Diana, 167.

Diderot, 31.

Didyme, 71 *note*.

Discours de la Tragédie, 76 *and note*,
 77 *note*, 82 *note*, 85 *note*, 86 *note*,
 94 *notes*, 95 *note*, 96.

Discours des Trois Unités, 76, 86
note, 88 *and note*, 89 *note*, 90 *note*,
 91 *notes*, 92 *note*, 94 *notes*, 95 *and*
notes, 96.

Discours du Poème dramatique, 11,
 12 *note*, 76, 88 *note*, 89 *note*, 90
notes, 92 *note*, 94 *note*, 95 *note*, 96.

Discourse on Comedy and Tragedy,
91 note.

Dittamondo, 114 note.

Domenico, 113.

Don Diègue, 74.

Don Fernando, 68.

Don Garcie de Navarre, 11, 104, 112,
141, 143.

Don Juan, 70 and note, 100, 106,
110, 114, 128 f., 130 and note, 131,
141, 143 f.

Don Quixote, 144.

Don Sanche d'Aragon, 31 and note,
46, 70.

Donneau de Visé, 46 note, 47 f., 49
and note.

Dorante, 13 note, 126, 142.

Doris, 14.

Dorine, 100, 112, 120, 141.

Dramatic Values, 119 note.

Dromio, 140.

Du Bellay, 28 note.

Dufresny, 115.

E

El Alcalde de Zalamea, 69 note, 70,
72 note.

El Astrólogo fingido, 71 note.

El Burlador de Sevilla, 70 note,
104.

El Desdén con el Desden, 127 note.

El José de los mujeres, 68 note.

El Pintor de su Deshonra, 69 note,
72 note.

El postrer Duelo de España, 72 note.

Electra, 83.

Éliacin, 178.

Éliante, 136.

Elmire, 129.

Élomire hypocondre, 109 note.

Émilie, 13, 44, 93.

Épître à Monsieur de Zuylichem,
46 note.

Éraste, 105.

Ériphile, 158, 171, 176.

Esther, 85 note, 156 f., 159 note, 181
and note, 182.

Étéocle, 151.

Études Littéraires, 179 note.

Euripides, 85 note, 92, 152 f., 166.

Eurydice, 51.

Every Man in His Humour, 91 note.

Examen de Clitandre, 90 note, 92.

Examen de Don Sanche d'Aragon,
70 note.

Examen de la Suite du Menteur,
70 note.

Examen de Médée, 87 note.

Examen de Nicomède, 81 note.

Examen de Polyeucte, 53 and note,
54 note, 55 notes, 56 note.

Examen de Rodogune, 45 note, 81
note.

Examen du Menteur, 70 note, 142
note.

F

Fabio, 105.

Faguet, E., 179 notes.

Faust, 82 note.

Fazio degli Uberti, 114 note.

Fedeli (I), 109.

Félix, 55 f., 58.

Fénelon, 50, 51 note.

Flaminio, 105.

Fouquet, 47, 131 note.

Fromageot, 33 note.

Frye, P. H., 78 note.

Fulvie, 93.

G

Garnier, Robert, 27 note.

Gazette de France, 46 note.

Gelosi (I), 107.

Gemma, 111.

George Dandin, 73, 101 f., 128, 132.

Georgette, 122.

Gherardi, 102 note.

Goethe, 20, 82 note, 183.

Gorgibus dans le Sac, 102.

Grammont, Duc de, 48.

Greek Drama, 20 note.

Grévin, Jacques, 114.

Grignan, Madame de, 51 note.

Gros-Guillaume, 109.

Gros René, 105.

Gros René écolier, 102.

Grotius, 54.

Groto, 108.

Gueulette, 110.

H

Hamlet, 81 note, 85 note, 86, 170.

Hamlet, 85, 137, 150.

Hardy, Alexandre, 12 note, 28 and
note, 35, 36 and note, 84, 187.

Hardy et le Théâtre français, 28 note.
 Harpagon, 141.
 Hector, 161.
 Hegel, 20 and note.
 Heinsius, 54.
 Hémon, 151.
 Henriette, 119, 134.
 Henriette d'Angleterre, 50.
 Henry III, 107.
 Henry V, 26.
Héraclius, 45 f., 63, 80, 82.
 Hermione, 155, 161 ff., 172, 188 note.
Hernani, 65, 86.
Hippolyte (Garnier), 27 note.
 Hippolyte, 152 f., 158, 164 note,
 166 f., 177, 188 note, 190.
Hippolytus, 152, 153 note.
 Hippolytus, 153.
 Horace, 24 and note, 25 and note,
 42 f., 52 and note, 71 and note,
 73 and note, 80, 90.
 Horace, 92.
 Horace (*L'École des Femmes*), 123.
 Hugo, Victor, 65, 86.
 Huszār, G., 62 note, 64 note, 71 note,
 72 note.

I

Ibsen, 135.
 Il Aretino, 111.
Il Convitato di Pietra, 110.
Il Fedele, 114 note.
Il Ritratto, 112.
Il Teatro senza Commedia, 114 note.
Imitation of Christ, 46.
Iphigénie, 25 and note, 26 and notes,
 135 and note, 157, 158 and note,
 164, 167 and note, 171 and notes,
 175 and notes, 176 and notes, 181
 note, 187 notes, 189 and notes, 190
 and notes.
 Iphigénie, 189.
 Isabelle, 117 ff.

J

Janet, Paul, 159 note, 160 note, 162
 and note, 164, 182 note.
 Jean de la Taille, 27 note.
 Jezebel, 179.
 Joad, 168, 178, 180.
 Joas, 179.
 Job, 166.
 Jocaste, 151.

Jodelle, 35.
 John I, 68.
 Josabeth, 180.
 Jourdain, Monsieur, 101.
Julius Caesar, 23.
 Julius Caesar, 137.
 Junie, 25, 167.

K

Keble, J., 81 note.

L

La Bruyère, 131 note.
La Clave de la honra, 63 note.
La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas, 100 f.,
 132.
La Conquête de la Toison d'or, 47.
La Creduta Maschio, 114.
La Critique de l'École des Femmes,
 122 and note, 124, 125 note, 126
 notes, 127 and note.
La Défense du Cid, 41.
La Deffense et illustration de la
langue françoise, 28 note.
La Emilia, 108.
La Fausse Prude, 115.
 La Flèche, 100.
 La Fontaine, 121.
La Galerie du Palais, 36.
La Genèse de la Philosophie etc. de
Calderón, 65 note.
 La Grange, 98, 101 note.
La Jalousie du Barbouillé, 99, 101 f.
La Mort de Pompée, 44.
La Place Royale, 19 note, 36.
La Princesse d'Élide, 62, 127.
La Psychologie de Racine, 159 note,
 160 note, 162 note, 164 note, 182
 note.
La Suite du Menteur, 45, 70.
La Suivante, 37.
La Troade, 27 note.
La Veuve, 11, 13 note, 14, 36.
La Vida es sueño, 66, 67 and note, 68.
La Vie dans la tragédie de Racine,
 188 note.
La Voix publique et l'Inconnu et
Véritable Ami de M.M. de Scudéry
et Corneille, 40.
 Lady Macbeth, 137.
 Lady Macduff, 137 note.
L'Amour Malade, 110.

- L'Amour Médecin*, 62, 100, 106, 110.
L'Avare, 17, 100, 106, 132 f., 140 note, 141 note.
Lanson, G., 17 note, 61 and note, 84 note.
Larivey, 27, 132 note.
Lear, 79 f., 82, 85, 137.
Le Bidois, G., 150 note, 153 note, 170 note, 182 note, 188 note.
Le Bon, 22 f.
Le Boulanger de Chalussay, 109 note.
Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, 62, 100 f., 106 f., 120, 128, 132.
Le Cid, 27, 36 ff., 42 f., 49, 52 and note, 59 f., 63, 70 and note, 71, 73 and note, 80, 82, 90.
Le Cid, 74, 150.
Le Docteur amoureux, 99, 101.
Le Docteur pédant, 102.
L'École des Femmes, 32 note, 122 and note, 123, 124 and note, 130, 135.
L'École des Maris, 71 note, 106, 113, 117, 118 and notes, 122, 124 and note, 134.
Le Fagoteux, 102.
Le Gelosie fortunée del Principe Rodrigo, 113.
Le Jars, L., 132 note.
Le Jugement du Cid par un bourgeois de Paris, 41 and note.
Le Kain, 30, 31 note, 34 note.
Le Maître d'École, 102.
Le Malade Imaginaire, 62, 100, 104 note, 120, 134, 140 note, 141 note.
Le Mariage forcé, 99, 127.
Le Médecin malgré lui, 100, 102, 106, 132.
Le Médecin volant, 101, 102 and note, 106, 113.
Le menteur, 13 note, 16 note, 45, 61 and note, 70, 133, 139, 141 f.
Le Misanthrope, 11, 30 note, 107, 134 f., 136 note, 143.
Le Misanthrope, 136 f.
Le Pédant joué, 100.
Le Rire, 16 and note, 18 note, 139 note, 140 notes, 146 note.
Le Sicilien, 62, 109 and note, 132, 133 note, 143 note.
Lee, Sidney, 132 note, 146 note.
Legouis, 21, 185 note.
Lélie, 142.
Lemaitre, 52 note, 86 note, 96 note.
Léonor, 119 f.
Les Amants Magnifiques, 62, 99.
Les Ébahis, 114.
Les Époques du Théâtre français, 19 note.
Les Fâcheux, 32 note, 121 f.
Les Femmes savantes, 17 note, 30 note, 133, 143.
Les Fourberies de Scapin, 99, 102, 106, 132, 140 note.
Les Frères Ennemis, 151 and notes, 154 and note, 166, 181 note.
Les Frères Parfaict, 102 note, 113.
Les Observations sur les sentiments de l'Académie, 42 and note.
Les Plaideurs, 11, 133, 139 and note, 142.
Les Précieuses ridicules, 106, 112, 143.
Les Trois Docteurs rivaux, 102.
Les Tuileries, 37.
Lethaby, 53 note.
Lettre à l'Académie, 51 note.
Lettre apologétique du S^r Corneille, 40 and note.
Lettre de Balzac à Corneille, 44 note.
Lettre de Chapelain à Boisrobert, 42 note.
Lettre de La Fontaine à Maucroix, 122 note.
Lettre de Madame de Sévigné à Madame de Grignan, 51 note.
Lettre de Rousseau à Brossette, 102 note.
Lettre de Valincour à l'abbé d'Olivet, 50 note.
Lettre du 13 janvier, 122 note.
Lettre du S^r Claveret à Monsieur de Corneille, 40 note.
L'Étoile, 37.
L'Étourdi, 99, 104 note, 105 f., 108, 133, 140 note, 141, 142 and note.
L'Illusion Comique, 37, 41.
L'Impromptu de Versailles, 29 and note, 122, 127.
L'Inavvertito, 105.
L'Intéresse, 105.
Lisardo, 63 note.
Lisette, 117, 120 f.
Lo Ipocrito, 111.
Lope de Vega, 61, 62 and note, 63 and note, 69 note, 70 and note, 117.
Loret, 47 note, 122.

Los dos amantes del cielo, 68 note.
 Louis XIV, 74, 131 and note, 136,
 167.
 Louison, 134.
 Louvois, 48.
Love after Death, 69 note, 72 note.
 Lucas, 100.
Lucelle, 132 note.
 Lucile, 105.
Luiz Perez the Galician, 70.
 Lulli, 33 note, 110, 114.
 Lyciscas, 128.

M

Macbeth, 83 note.
 McCarthy, D. F., 69 note.
 Maeterlinck, 58, 174 and note.
 Maintenon, Madame de, 115.
 Mairret, 41, 48.
 Manrique, Jorge, 64 note.
 Margoliouth, Prof., 20 note, 78 note,
 81 note.
 Mariane, 133.
 Marie de Médicis, 107, 109.
 Marinette, 105.
 Marlowe, 36 note.
 Marphurius, 99.
 Martin, 32 note.
 Martine, 30 note.
 Mascarille, 105 f., 142.
 Mathan, 179.
 Maxime, 93.
 Mazarin, 109, 131 note.
Medea, 37, 94.
Médée (Jean de la Taille), 27 note.
Médée (Corneille), 37, 63.
Méditation Quatrième, 138 note.
Mélicerte, 11, 132.
Mélite, 12 note, 36, 90, 95.
Mémoires et Anecdotes, 51 note.
Mémoires sur la vie de Jean Racine,
 52 note.
Merchant of Venice, 170.
Mercure de France, 29 note.
Mercure Galant, 46 note, 47 note.
 Meredith, G., 17 note, 140 and notes.
Métaphraste, 99.
 Milton, 83 note.
 Minos, 177.
 Mira de Mescua, 63 note, 70 note.
Mirame, 113 note.
Mithridate, 163 and note, 164 note.
 Moland, L., 103 notes, 104 note, 105
 note, 107 note, 108 note.

Molé, 30 note.

Molière, 11, 16 f., 21, 27 and note,
 29 and note, 31, 32 note, 33 note,
 35 note, 51, 62, 70 note, 73, 99,
 100 and note, 101 and note, 102,
 103 and note, 104 ff., 108 f., 110
 and note, 111-17, 118 and note,
 119 and note, 121, 122 and note,
 123-30, 131 and note, 132, 133 and
 note, 134-8, 141-7.
Molière (Rigal), 123 note, 124 note,
 128 note, 130 note.
Molière et la Comédie italienne, 103
 notes, 104 note, 105 note, 107 note,
 108 note.
Molière et la Farce, 17 note.
Molière et Shakspeare, 17 note, 22
 note, 144 note, 145 notes, 146 notes.
Molière, His Life and Works, 66 note.
Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, 62,
 100 f., 132.
 Montague, C. E., 119 note.
 Montfleury, 29 and note.
 Moreto, 127 note.
 Moses, 169.
 Mounet-Sully, 30.
 Munday, 114.
 Murray, Prof. G., 153 note.

N

Narcisse, 25, 162.
 Neptune, 167.
 Néron, 152, 157, 162, 167.
 Nicole, 100, 120.
Nicomède, 24 and notes, 46, 52, 80 ff.,
 88, 99.
Nouvelles Nouvelles, 48 note, 49 note,
 112.

O

Observations sur le Cid, 38 and note.
 Œdipe, 47, 49, 52.
 Oedipus, 77.
 Œnone, 155 f., 173.
Œuvres diverses (Corneille), 49.
 Ophelia, 137.
 Oreste, 154 f., 161 ff., 172.
 Orgon, 107, 112, 129, 141.
 Othello, 71 and note, 155, 170.

P

Panrace, 99.
 Pandolfo, 105.
 Pantalon, 105, 110.

Pantaleone, 114.
 Pascal, 19.
 Pauline, 55 ff.
 Péliisson, 45.
 Perrault, 48 and note.
 Perrin, 100.
 Persée, 33 note.
 Pertharite, 46, 71 note.
 Phèdre, 152 f., 155 note, 156 note, 162 note, 164 f., 166 and notes, 167 and note, 172, 177 and notes, 181 note, 188 note, 190 and notes.
 Phèdre, 18, 137, 152-6, 158 and notes, 162, 177.
 Philip II, 65, 69 note, 70.
 Pierrot, 108.
 Placide, 82 note.
 Poetics (Aristotle), 12 note, 20 note, 54, 76, 77 note, 78 note, 81 note, 94 note.
 Polichinelle, 104.
 Polidore, 105.
 Polyucte, 44, 52 ff., 56 note, 59, 63, 67 f., 80 ff., 90.
 Polyucte, 31, 57, 68, 137.
 Pompée, 90.
 Portia, 170.
 Port-Royal, 19, 165.
 Porus, 151.
 Pratique du Théâtre, 48.
 Préface de Clitandre, 87 note, 92 notes.
 Préface de l'Édition de Molière de 1682, 98 note.
 Premier placet présenté au Roy sur la Comédie de Tartufe, 130.
 Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals, 22 note, 23 note.
 Psyché, 51, 132.
 Psychologie des Foules, 22 note.
 Pulchérie, 51 f.
 Pylade, 172, 188 note.
 Pyrrhus, 154 f., 161, 172.

Q

Quinault, 134.

R

Rachel, 30, 186.
 Racine, 11, 18, 19 note, 21, 25 f., 28 f., 50 ff., 59 and note, 60 f., 86 f., 97 f., 132 note, 135, 137 f.,

139 and note, 143, 148-59, 161, 163-75, 181-91.
 Racine, Louis, 52 note.
 Racine and the French Classical Drama, 30 note, 32 note.
 Recherches sur les Théâtres de France, 60 note.
 Regnard, 115.
 Reinach, S., 96 note.
 Renaudot, 46 note.
 Réponse à l'Ami du Cid, 42 note.
 Revue Bleue, 74 note.
 Ricciardo, 105.
 Riccoboni, 113 note.
 Richelieu, 28 note, 38, 41 ff., 113 note, 131 note.
 Rigal, 28 note, 123 note, 124 note, 128 note, 130 note.
 Rodelinde, 71 and note.
 Rodogune, 48, 81 note, 82 f., 85 note.
 Rodrigue, 37, 52, 63, 73.
 Rotrou, 37, 45, 151.
 Rousseau, 18.
 Roxane, 164 note, 175.

S

Saint-Évremond, 50 f.
 Scala, F., 108.
 Scaliger, 48 f.
 Scaramuccia, 109, 110 note.
 Scarron, 50.
 Schelandre, de, Jean, 12 note.
 Schlegel, 144.
 Scudéry, 38, 39 and notes, 41 f.
 Secchi, Nicolò, 105.
 Segrais, 51.
 Seigall, 13 note.
 Sémiramis, 32 note.
 Seneca, 62.
 Sentiments de l'Académie sur le Cid, 39, 41 f.
 Sertorius, 47, 49.
 Sévère, 55 ff.
 Sévigné, Madame de, 51 and note.
 Sganarelle, 106, 112.
 Sganarelle, 71 note, 106, 111, 113, 118 and note, 119 ff.
 Shakespeare, 21 f., 29, 35 note, 58, 61, 84, 89, 93, 97, 116, 137 note, 141, 144 f., 163 note, 164 note, 170, 182 f., 185.
 Shakespearean tragedy, 80 note, 85 note.

Sigismond, 66 f.
Six premières Comédies, 27.
Slaughter of the Innocents, 54.
Sommaire de l'Impromptu de Versailles, 127 note.
 Sophocles, 78, 83.
Sophonisbe, 14 note, 16, 48, 52.
 Sorel, Charles, 41, 43 note.
 Souche, M. de la, 122.
 Sourdiac, Marquis de, 47.
 Stapfer, 17 note, 22 note, 144 note, 145 notes, 146 notes.
 Stratonice, 57 f.
Studies of the Greek Poets, 79 note.
Suréna, 51.
 Symonds, J. A., 79.

T

Tancrède, 31 note.
Tartufe, 11, 17, 100, 129 and notes, 131, 140 note, 143, 146.
Tartufe, 107, 111 f., 120, 128, 129 and note.
Taxile, 151, 154.
 Terence, 117.
The Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem, 53 note.
The Claims of French Poetry, 183 note.
The Constant Prince, 67 f.
The French Renaissance in England, 28 note, 132 note.
The Idea of Comedy, 17 note, 18 note, 140 note.
The Idea of Tragedy, 24 note.
The pleasant and fine conceited comedie of Two Italian Gentlemen, 114 note.
The Stones of Paris, 32 note.
The Taming of the Shrew, 144.
The Tempest, 141, 170.
The Winter's Tale, 164 note.
Théodore, 45, 52, 71 note, 81, 82 note.
Théodore, 71.

Theory of Poetry, 81 note.
 Thérémène, 188 note.
 Thésée, 164 note, 177.
 Thibaut, 100.
 Thomas, Lucien-Paul, 65 note.
 Thyestes, 77.
 Tibaudier, M., 101.
 Tirso de Molina, 62 note, 70 note.
Tite et Bérénice, 50, 52.
Tite et Titus ou les deux Béréenices, 50 and note.
 Titus, 187, 189.
 Toinette, 100, 120, 134, 141.
 Tontain, Charles, 27 note.
Trésor chronologique et historique, 43 note.
Trois nouvelles Comédies, 27.
 Truffaldino, 104.
Twelfth Night, 164 note.

U

Uranie, 127.

V

Valens, 82 note.
 Valère, 117, 118 and note, 119.
Verdad Sospechosa, 61 note.
Véritable Saint Genest, 45.
Vers à Fouquet, 47 note.
Versailles Illustré, 33 note.
 Vigny, A. de, 148.
 Virgil, 183.
 Voiture, 44.
 Voltaire, 32 note, 34 note, 127 and note.

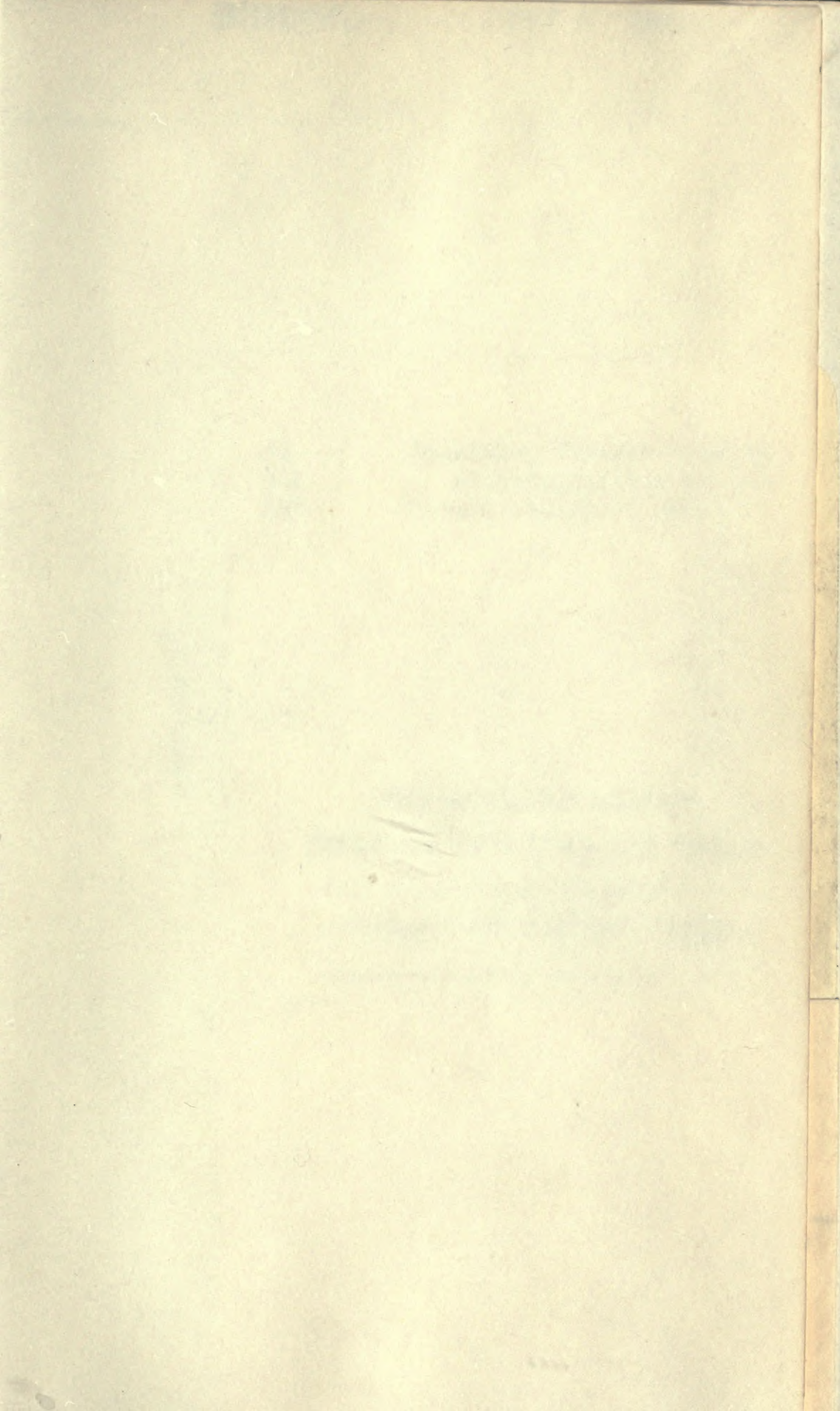
W

Wilhelm Meister, 20 note.

Z

Zacharie, 178.
 Zucca, 105.





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